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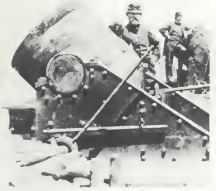

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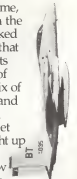

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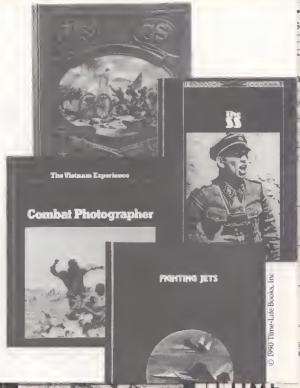

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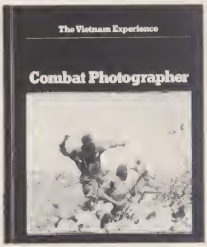

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World War II

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COVER: M-4 Sherman medium tanks of the U.S. Army's 1st Armored Division move into formation in a desert setting. LEFT: When France fell to the German invaders in June 1940, a crucial question centered around the fate of her powerful fleet (story, P. 18). MIDDLE: The loss of Western-controlled territories in the Far East, such as the Philippines, to Japan was temporary, but the consequences were more far-reaching (story, P. 34). RIGHT: A great deal of the German Fw-190s that bedeviled American aircraft over Eastern Europe were actually Romanian IAR-80s (story, P. 12).

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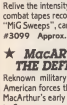

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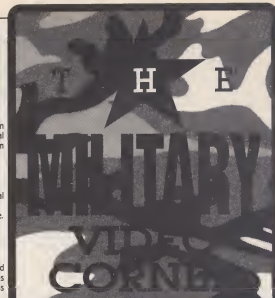

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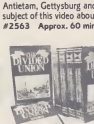

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Picture the "parade"—stumpy coasting *schuits* from Holland and various other coasters and paddle steamers; tugs towing barges and even mud scows; sloops, yachts and fishing boats; Belgian drifters and whalers, even speedboats soon lost to sight among the whitecaps. And trawlers, ferryboats, minesweepers, and more than a few lifeboats without their ship. And often crashing through the mob, destroyers looking big as a house. "There was the old *Brighton Belle* that carried holiday crowds in the days before the Boer War. She swept mines in the Great War, and she swept mines in this war."

Crossing the Channel in the mid-body of this odd armada just about 50 years ago, our speaker was in the company of motorboats, of rescue launches, shrimp boats and even a flat-bottomed lighter used to evacuate another British army 25 years earlier at a place called Gallipoli.

And this place? This place was Dunkirk, unforgettable Dunkirk, the rescue of an army by a fleet of small boats operating night and day, May 29 to June 4, 1940, under the guns of the enemy. Crossing the Channel on his way *over* to the crowded beaches, Arthur Durham Divine was only halfway there on that first night when "we began to meet the first of the returning stream." And so it was, hour after hour, an assembly line of bobbing containers full of men, endlessly repeating the cycle like buckets on a chain.

"The little boats that ferried from the beach to the big ships in deep water listed drunkenly with the weight of men," wrote Divine later. "The big ships slowly took on lists of their own with the enormous numbers crowded aboard. And always down the dunes and across the beach came new hordes of men, new columns, new lines."

Winston Churchill called it "the queerest, most nondescript flotilla that ever was . . . manned by every kind of Englishman." But, off the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940, it worked a miracle.

Journalist Divine (for Britain's Kemsley newspapers) saw the moving, *fantastical* and absolutely vital Dunkirk evacuation (and wrote about it, too) from a perspective that was unique. As a boating enthusiast, he was among the first of hundreds who answered the Admiralty's call for boats of all kinds. He was assigned to a motorboat 30 feet long—one cabin forward and the rest open to the elements; twin engines to give her speed. He had one admiral aboard with him—the admiral, in fact, who was in charge of small boats. And so, he saw it all, start to end.

In the Channel itself, the dangers were collisions among so many craft heading both ways at once; and attack from the air or from the enemy's own speedy boats. Close up to Dunkirk, the danger was of another kind and all the more tangible and constant: "The breakwaters and lighthouse were magnificently silhouetted against the flames of burning oil tanks—enormous flames that licked high above the town."

For days, as the men lined up, Dunkirk remained under relentless, pounding fire—"the din was infernal." Related one rescued soldier: "When we were hit by bombs we swam ashore, but when the ship didn't go down, we swam back to her again to take her out of the harbor. Then she turned turtle and we had to swim again. Some of us were in the water for hours before we were picked up by a British warship."

Divine reckoned that perhaps 800 or more boats of all kinds took part in the evacuation of the British, French, Polish and Belgian troops who had been pushed back to the sea by the Nazi juggernaut in May 1940. With Dunkirk's docks destroyed by German bombs, they had to flee from raw beaches and a single mole just wide enough for three men at a time.

The boats came over captained by as motley an assortment as the boats themselves—bankers, lawyers, dentists, Sea Scouts, taxi drivers, boys and old men.

Two lines that could have been penned by Churchill explain what Divine saw . . . and experienced. In one, he says: "It was the queerest, most nondescript flotilla that ever was, and it was manned by every kind of Englishman, never more than two men, often only one, to each small boat." And in the other: "There was never such a fleet went to war before, I think."

And yet . . . yet, miracle of miracles, "where the government and the Board of Admiralty had hoped to bring away 30,000 men, we brought away 335,000."

Britain in just a few weeks' time would be engaged in battle for the entire country's very survival—the Battle of Britain. And when that was done, another miracle, Winston Churchill himself would note that so many owed so much to so few. At Dunkirk, earlier, however, the same sentiment applied . . . exactly.

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World War II

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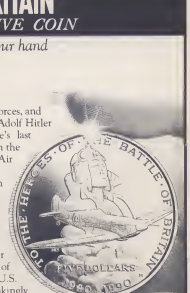

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Willie Smith's escape from captivity was born of desperation rather than any seemingly workable plan.

By Arthur L. Kelly

Cheers rang out in the aisles of the shantytown barracks and spirits soared as the POWs gazed at the white stars on the wings of the approaching bomber above. The message was clear to all—American forces were drawing closer to the POW compound on Palawan Island in the Philippines. Up to this day, October 28, 1944, the prisoners had seen no sign of possible liberation.

Having endured so much at the hands of their captors after the fall of Bataan and Corregidor in the spring of 1942, the emaciated, poorly clad POWs thought that perhaps their plight would soon be ended.

And so their celebrating continued as they watched bombs falling on the concrete airfield they themselves recently completed, by hand, after more than two years of hard, unrelenting labor.

Beyond range of the euphoric shouting, clad only in patched, homemade blue shorts, stood Rufus Willie Smith, 25, a 6-foot, painfully thin but good-natured Marine from Hughes Springs, Texas. Hearing about the tumult later, Smith still could not possibly know that he soon would be witness to one of the war's worst atrocities.

American prisoners in the Philippines await the march to Japanese captivity. At the compound on Palawan Island on Dec. 14, 1944, the prospect of liberation only signaled mass-murder.

On the morning of December 14, Smith and his fellow prisoners were surprised when the guards told them the day's work was done—they should leave the airstrip and return to the POW compound.

There, the puzzled prisoners received their noon meal. About an hour later, 70 Japanese soldiers were assembled outside the compound. They were told the Americans soon would be landing troops on Palawan—the POWs would have to be disposed of.

Then, the air raid alarm sounded. The guards herded Smith and the others into the air raid shelters. While the POWs were huddled in the shelters, however, one group of Japanese soldiers poured buckets of aviation fuel over the shelters. Immediately, a second group threw lighted torches on the helpless, fuel-covered POWs. Fortunately for Smith and the 20 or so men in his trench, no gas had been poured on their shelter when a torch was thrown in.

Hearing shouting and shooting and people running, Willie Smith thought that guerrillas had attacked the Japanese, so he stepped up on the bottom step to the entrance of his own lightly covered trench to peer out. He saw black smoke billowing upward, men in flames running about, and Japanese soldiers shooting and stabbing with bayonets. Horrified, he watched one friend's head tumble to the ground—a Japanese officer had cut it off with his sword.

Smith could only take a quick glance at that awful scene because machine-gun bullets started whizzing by his head. Terrified, he dived to the bottom of the trench and told the other men there what was going on.

Quickly, someone jerked out a sandbag that plugged a hole in the wall.

With lightning speed, Smith bolted through the hole head first and landed several feet below in the sand. Halting momentarily, he reached out and clasped the hand of Glen McDole, a fellow Marine from Des Moines, Iowa—and his best friend. With deep emotions, they let their eyes do the talking until Smith said, "I'll see you later." Then, turning to the right, he darted up the beach.

He looked desperately for a hiding place. Machine-gunners on two boats in the bay were determined to kill every one of the fleeing prisoners. Running past a large pile of coconut hulls and trash where other POWs were burrowing in to hide from the Japanese, Smith found a cut in the cliff and crawled up it to the level of the killing yard.

Although he was now only 30 feet from two guards standing by the barbed wire at the outer edge of the enclosed compound, Smith had found an ideal hiding place. Tall weeds bent over small shrubs formed a culvert-like tunnel. He could see out through openings in the vegetation, but the guards in the bright sun could not see in. Smith worked himself around so that he could jump off the cliff again if he had to.

From this vantage point, he watched, for what seemed like hours, the horror of an ungodly massacre. He saw two more men beheaded. He saw men covered with flames, running around in unbearable pain. Some were pleading to be shot; others were cursing the Japanese but still demanding that they shoot them to put them out of their misery. Their

Continued on page 64

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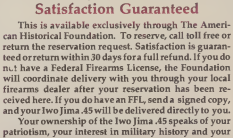

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IJ198

Mussolini might complain of loyalty betrayed, but so might the country that followed him.

By Bernard Nalty

Armed Italian partisans routed the two of them from bed, the old man and the young woman. He was Benito Mussolini, *Il Duce*, the 62-year-old former dictator of Italy who, after being overthrown in 1943, served strictly as a puppet of the Germans.

She was his mistress, Clara Petacci. Now 33 years old, she had been barely 21 when she first met Mussolini. With the kind of desperate loyalty that he inspired in so many persons, she had followed him then and she had done so even after he had been deposed. Now, she joined him as a prisoner of the Italian guerrillas.

These irregulars, some of whom had loyally obeyed the dictator's orders only a short time before, realized that their former leader had betrayed the country, plunging it needlessly into a war that had brought defeat and ruin. On April 28, 1945, they had their revenge, standing the two prisoners against a wall and shooting them to death.

Petacci's last words rang of loyalty. "Aren't you glad that I followed you to the end?" she asked. Unmoved, he did not answer. As was true for so many of his intimates, indeed for an entire nation, loyalty to Mussolini brought only death.

Benito Mussolini had an uncanny gift for inspiring loyalty, but his ambitions carried Italy beyond her capabilities. By 1945, even his charisma could not offset the resentment of his people.

Clara Petacci was not the only woman caught in his spell. She had been his mistress, but an endless succession of women—peasants and aristocrats, married or single—had shared his bed. Betrayed again and again, Rachele Guidi, Mussolini's wife and the mother of his five children, nevertheless remained fiercely loyal to him. Perhaps, years earlier, she should have heeded Mussolini's father who, upon hearing that Rachele planned to marry his son, told her she would be better off throwing herself under a train. On the night of April 26, two days before the executions, the fleeing dictator and his wife were in the town of Como. Although he made no effort to see her, she reached him by telephone and tried to comfort him. Typically, he did not respond, and she and her two younger children did not see him before they were interned by American troops.

In his prime, the powerfully built Mussolini, with flashing eyes and jutting jaw, had seemed the embodiment of military virtue. Born in 1883, he had inherited both his physical strength and his politics from his father, Alessandro, a blacksmith and Socialist. As a Socialist in his turn, the younger Mussolini had opposed World War I until Italy became involved; then he enlisted, served for two years, and was wounded in action. When the fighting ended, he turned violently against the Socialists and organized a group of former servicemen into the Fascist Party. By using his recruits as strikebreakers, he won the support of Italy's industrialists. In 1922, he decided that the Fascists were strong enough to demand the establishment of a dictatorship of the people in which he would rule on behalf of the masses. Inspired by the poetry of Gabrielle D'Annunzio and encouraged by associates such as Italo Balbo and Cesare Rossi, Mussolini organized a march on Rome. The Italian army refused to intervene, and a demoralized king made him prime minister, the first step on the path to absolute power.

Italians and foreigners alike became impressed by the facade that Mussolini erected, the image of a modern Caesar capable of bringing order and efficiency to an Italy desperately in need of discipline. No small contribution to that picture was the skill with which Count Galeazzo Ciano conducted Italian foreign policy. In the United States, Brig. Gen. Billy Mitchell, the Army airman, saw only the facade and pronounced Mussolini "one of the greatest constructive powers for good government that exists in the world today." In the United Kingdom, where sober citizens applauded Mussolini's ability to make Italy's trains run on time, Sir Austen Chamberlain, a monocled former prime minister, echoed the praise, exchanged Christmas greetings with the dictator and even vacationed with him.

Mussolini had found inspiration in the fervid nationalistic poetry of D'Annun-

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376-413

Between its French engine and Polish tail, the IAR-80's design was Romanian and quite up-to-date.

By Jon Guttman

When American B-24 Liberator bombers ran the deadly gauntlet over the oilfields at Ploesti, their aircrews were too busy fighting for their lives to pay much attention to the enemy aircraft that attacked them. As far as they were concerned, the aerial opposition was German and Messerschmitt. In the heat of combat, they did not always notice the yellow crosses with red, yellow and blue cockades in the center that identified their adversaries as being Romanian. Indeed, many of the sleek fighters that darted in and out of their formations were not Messerschmitts, but Romanian-designed aircraft that most Americans had never even heard of—IAR-80s and 81s.

On December 1, 1925, the *Industria Aeronautica Romana* (IAR) was founded in Brasov on land provided by the Romanian government, with supplementary capital provided by the French Blériot-Spad and Lorraine-Dietrich companies, and a nucleus of equipment and personnel furnished by the indigenous Astra firm. Aside from a few designs of its own that enjoyed modest production, IAR was primarily devoted to manufacturing foreign-designed military aircraft for the *Fortelor Aeriene Regal ale Romania* (FARR). From 1933 on, IAR was engaged in license production of Poland's PZL P-11c. In 1936, the Romanian company began producing an improved variant of the Polish fighter, the P-11f.

In addition to the airframes, IAR also built French engines, with the Gnôme-Rhône 9K Mistral radial selected to power the PZL fighter. However, IAR is alleged to have redesigned or modified no less than 580 of the French engine's 648 component parts in the process of gearing up toward its production.

An IAR-80, its ornate, yellow Axis crosses replaced by Allied cockades, dives on a German target shortly after Romania's change of sides on August 23, 1944.

In late 1937, IAR, after having built 70 PZL P-11fs, replaced that type on the production line with the more refined P-24e. However, by the time the first P-24es began reaching FARR squadrons in early 1938, it was patently evident that the Polish fighter series, with strut-braced, shoulder-mounted gull wings and fixed landing gear, had been rendered obsolescent by the rapid advances in military aviation design abroad. The Polish PZL design team was already contemplating a fresh concept based on the all-metal, stressed-skin, cantilever low-winged monoplanes with retractable undercarriage that, since 1936, had emerged as the wave of the future. The Romanians agreed, but in October 1937, IAR designers, under the direction of Professor Ion Grosu, chose to embark along a design course all their own.

By December 1938, the prototype IAR-80, designed by Grosu, Professor Ion Cosereanu and engineers Gheorghe Zotta and G. Wallner, was completed. Although it aimed to produce a fighter equal to the best in the world, the IAR team was cautious enough to incorporate as many proven components from the existing PZL fighter as possible. The shape of the tail surfaces displayed the most marked PZL pedigree, but the rest of the IAR-80's sleek airframe was distinctive and original in appearance. Its duralumin wing structure was made up of two spars and 38 ribs. The entire airplane was covered in duralumin sheet, save for the ailerons, elevators and rudder, which were fabric-covered. The wings had hydraulically driven flaps and retractable landing gear whose wide track made for good taxiing stability on the ground.

The 14-cylinder IAR-K 14-III C-36 engine was an improved derivative of the French Mistral-Major, which was already being produced for use in the PZL-24e. It could produce 930 horsepower at 11,810 feet, was enclosed in a long-chord NACA-type cowling, and drove a VDM three-bladed variable-pitch propeller.

The IAR-80 made its first flight in April 1939, with Captain Dumitru ("Pufi") Popescu at the controls. In that and subsequent official flights, it was found that the view from the cockpit was poor for taking off and landing but, once in the air, handling and maneuvering characteristics were commendably good, while speed and climb were superior to all but a handful of American, British and German fighters.

Continued on page 16

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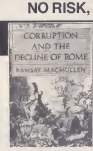

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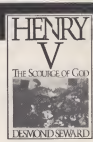

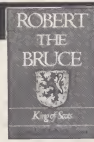

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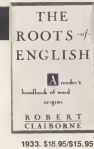

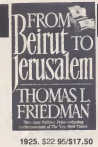

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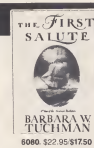

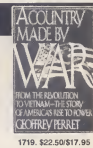

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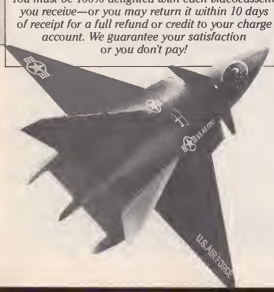

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Armament

Continued from page 12

IAR had been nationalized in 1938, and its Brasov plant had been expanded by the Romanian government to a total floor space of 1,400,000 square feet to house 7,000 personnel. The plant would now be utilized to mass-produce a slightly modified version of the IAR-80 prototype. Its fuselage was lengthened to 29 feet, 2 2/5 inches and its wingspan lengthened to 34 feet, 5½ inches to accommodate a more powerful 1,025 hp IAR-K 14-1000A engine. The braced tailplane of the PZL P-24e was replaced with a cleaner, unbraced cantilever structure, and the cockpit was enclosed in an aft-sliding blown-plexiglas canopy.

In the spring of 1940, the first IAR-80 was completed, and further production was assisted by some former PZL employees who had escaped from Poland after the German invasion of that country in September 1939. (Relations between then-still-neutral Romania and the expatriate Poles were cordial until June 1941, when Romania, under Ion Antonescu, threw her lot in with Nazi Germany.) In its production form, the IAR-80 could do 342 mph at 22,965 feet, and its range was 584 miles at a cruising speed of 205 mph. Maximum ceiling was 34,450 feet.

The first 50 IAR-80s to be built were armed with four 7.92mm FN-Browning machine guns in the wings, but the subsequent production batch of 90 IAR-80As was up-gunned to six 7.92mm wing guns. The 31 examples of the IAR-80B type had two 7.92mm guns and two 13.2mm weapons.

A variant of the IAR-80 with 7.87 inches more wingspan was called the IAR-81. Three variants of that series—the IAR-81 (with IAR-80A gun armament), 81A (with the IAR-80B's gun arrangement) and 81C (with two 7.92mm guns and two 20mm Mauser MG151 cannon)— all carried a 551-pound bomb on a belly rack and two 110-pound bombs on underwing racks. A long-range escort fighter version, the IAR-81B, carried supplementary fuel tanks in place of the bombs, and was armed with four Browning machine guns and two 20mm Ikaria or Oerlikon MG FF cannon.

During World War II, IAR conducted some trials with an IAR-81 armed with underwing-mounted, unguided air-to-air rockets, and another with a Junkers Jumo 211Da water-cooled engine.

By the spring of 1942, 270 IAR-80s and 81s had been completed, and production tempo at Brasov was up to one aircraft per day. Most of those aircraft had been assigned to squadrons (*Escadrile* 59, 61,

Continued on page 54

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Force H of the Royal Navy, including flagship Hood *(right), battleship* Barham *(center background) and carrier* Ark Royal *(left), steams past the Rock of Gibraltar in a painting by David Cobb. The first of many actions taken by this famous squadron was what Prime Minister Winston Churchill called "one of the most disagreeable and difficult tasks that a British admiral had ever been faced with."*

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cruisers *Arethusa* and *Enterprise*, and the 11 sliver shapes of the 8th and 13th Destroyer Flotillas. Ahead, moreover, the submarines *Proteus* and *Pandora* were already patrolling off the North African coast.

It was a modern-day armada loaded with seagoing firepower, and yet, Force H had been hastily assembled only days earlier. That was done to fill the western Mediterranean gap in the Allied naval defenses opened by France's collapse on June 20. The Royal Navy operated on the "two-power standard," whereby it theoretically could take on and defeat two enemies at one time. Until recently, Britain had been confronted by the German and Italian navies—the question now was whether she would be faced with a third enemy fleet, since France, possessor of the fourth largest navy in the world, had surrendered to Germany. Continuation of the war against Hitler and British survival hinged on continued supremacy at sea.

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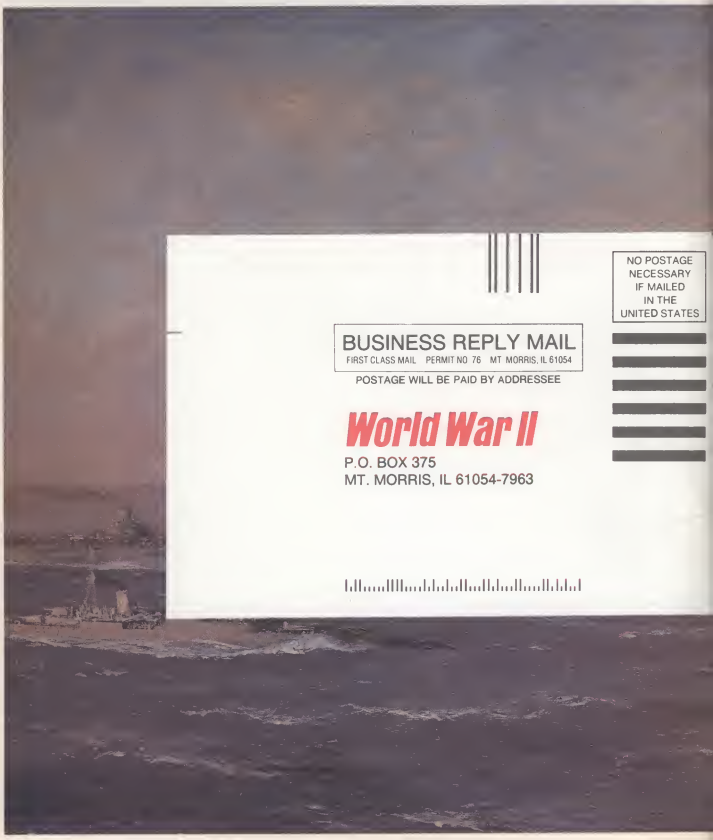

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Force H Calling

It was not entirely "friendly" fire that the French and British exchanged off the North African coast . . . and the damage was real.

By Wilfred P. Deac

WWII 50th

As the 17 warships of Britain's Force H steamed out of the harbor and into the Bay of Algeciras, they passed to starboard of the 1,398-foot Rock of Gibraltar, curved around the Europa Point lighthouse and zigzagged eastward into the calm Mediterranean at 17 knots. It was a few minutes past five, a sun-swept afternoon, a Tuesday in July 1940. It was 50 years ago this very summer.

Vice Admiral Sir James Frownes Somerville, tall and slim in the resplendent white uniform of His Majesty's Navy, stood on the flag bridge of HMS *Hood*. At 42,100 tons, his flagship of Force H was considered one of the world's most powerful ships. And around him, Somerville, then in the last days of his 57th year, could see the 30,000-ton battleships *Valiant* and *Resolution*, the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*, the cruisers *Arethusa* and *Enterprise*, and the 11 sliver shapes of the 8th and 13th Destroyer Flotillas. Ahead, moreover, the submarines *Proteus* and *Pandora* were already patrolling off the North African coast.

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At low tide at Dunkirk, German troops examine the wreck of the French destroyer Bourrasque, *sunk by Stukas during the Allied evacuation. The French fleet made a tempting prize for the Germans after Paris capitulated.*

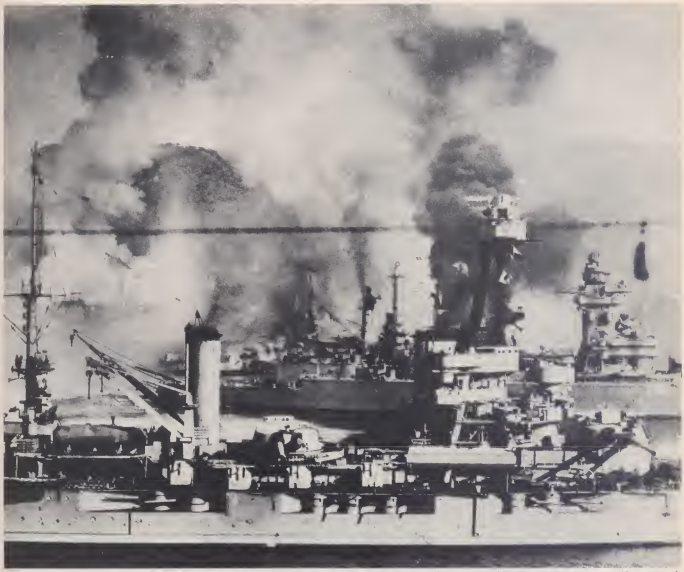
Admiral Somerville knew he had been assigned, as Prime Minister Winston Churchill phrased it, "one of the most disagreeable and difficult tasks that a British admiral had ever been faced with." That onerous task would be, as a phase of Operation Catapult, the "simultaneous seizure, control, or effective disablement or destruction of all the accessible French Fleet." To be sure, the Briton, his customary humor subdued by such orders, first was to present an ultimatum to his French counterpart at the North African naval base at Mers-el-Kebir. Churchill and his War Cabinet wanted their defeated ally's warships to either fight alongside Britain, steam in to British ports, sail to the French West Indies or scuttle themselves within six hours after receipt of the ultimatum. Otherwise, Somerville was "to use whatever force may be necessary" to keep the French vessels out of Axis hands. "No act," in Churchill's words, "was ever more necessary for the life of Britain."

French officials repeatedly assured their cross-Channel friends that they would sink their own fleet before surrendering it to the Germans or Italians. Article 8 of the Franco-German armistice effective on June 25 stipulated that French warships were to be "assembled . . . and disarmed" at their peacetime bases, that "the German Government solemnly declares" it would not seize them. Article 9, however, allowed the Germans to use French ships for "minesweeping" chores. Experience had taught Churchill not to trust Hitler's words.

Some hours after the armada's July 2 departure from Gibraltar, at 4 a.m., July 3, to be precise, the destroyer *Foxhound* increased speed and churned ahead of Force H. Aboard was Captain Cedric S. "Hooky" Holland, who had temporarily relinquished command of the carrier *Ark Royal* to hand-deliver Churchill's ultimatum to the French. Recently a naval attaché in Paris, Holland seriously considered resigning his command rather than be a part of Operation Catapult. But his sense of duty overcame his feelings.

Wednesday, July 3, dawned sunny and hazy, with the promise of heat to come. As *Foxhound* slowed to announce her arrival just before 6 a.m., the Gulf of Oran looked tranquil and unaffected by the war in Europe. The second largest city in the French territory of Algeria, Oran was a terraced huddle of white buildings to the southeast. The Mers-el-Kebir naval base was situated about four miles from Oran at the base of the high, treeless and brown *Djebel Murdjadjo* on the western side of the gulf. The masts and upperworks of the French fleet were visible above a tall stone breakwater projecting nearly a mile southeastward into the gulf from a hook of land. French naval units were situated in a number of other overseas ports, but Mers-el-Kebir held the greatest concentration of firepower.

Vice Admiral Marcel Bruno Gensoul, 59, often called merely "competent" as commander of the French Atlantic Fleet, flew his flag in the three-year-old, 26,500-ton battleship (bat-



He who hesitates is lost. Captain Louis Collinet's battle cruiser Strasbourg *wends her way between the* Provence *(foreground) and her burning sister ship,* Brétagne. Strasbourg *was the only French capital ship to escape Mers-el-Kebir.*

tle cruiser) *Dunkerque*. Also moored behind the mole and floating line of nets guarding the French harbor were *Dunkerque*'s sister ship *Strasbourg*, the modernized World War I-vintage battleships *Bretagne* and *Provence* (each about 22,000 tons), the 11,500-ton seaplane carrier *Commandant Teste* and six superdestroyers. The five largest ships were anchored and moored with their sterns to the jetty. *Dunkerque* and *Strasbourg*, specifically designed to master Hitler's pocket battleships, boasted eight 13-inch cannons housed in two quadruple turrets mounted forward—but at this moment pointing uselessly away from the sea.

At the extreme west side of the base lay the outsized destroyers. In addition, a mélange of destroyers, submarines and smaller vessels sat in nearby Oran harbor. As supplement for the seagoing "defenses," there also were Fort Stanton, hundreds of feet high atop Mardjadjo Hill; three coastal batteries east of Oran; and an airstrip.

Predictably, the sudden fall of their country had seriously demoralized the French forces, as demonstrated later in the day when French pilots flying superior aircraft surprised British aviators by not pressing home their attacks.

First, though, a seemingly endless series of ineffectual Anglo-French meetings, plagued by imperfect communication, showed that neither side really wanted to fight the other. Unfortunately, French Admiral Gensoul rejected the ultimatum, and British Admiral Somerville was told by London to "settle matters quickly," especially after the British obtained a French admiralty message ordering all available ships to reinforce Gensoul. The rising tension matched coastal North Africa's humid heat as the ultimatum deadline passed unheeded. Something had to give.

It finally did in midafternoon. Five bi-wing, single-engine Swordfish bombers wobbled off *Ark Royal*'s flight deck. Escorted by six Skua monoplanes, the open cockpit three-seaters swooped over the entrance to Mers-el-Kebir harbor. As Gensoul recorded in his after-action report: "At 1330, English aircraft dropped four or five mines . . ." The wily admiral ordered buoys and nets cleared to the south of the entrance channel to provide an alternate escape route. He also told his ship captains to get their steam up.

About the same time, when several submarines were spotted moving in Oran's harbor, Somerville told his airmen to mine the entrance to that port as well.

The French destroyer *Mogador* moved to the Mers-el-Kebir harbor entrance, while in-shore, dock crews stood by to cast off the mooring lines of the big ships, now departure-ready, with their men at battle stations. Artillery positions were manned—the coastal cannons had been in the process of being dismantled. Forty-two fighter planes took off from nearby La Senia airfield, but the French bombers there sat im-

mobilized on the air force commander's orders because, a few days before, some crews had flown their planes to Gibraltar to continue the war against Germany. The French were afraid of further defections. Minesweepers worked at the port entrances.

Outside, meanwhile, Force H steamed back and forth, a cat prowling before a mouse hole.

At 5:15 p.m., Somerville sent his final warning: "If none of the propositions is accepted before 1730 BST (5:30 p.m., British Summer Time)—I repeat, 1730 BST—it will be necessary to sink your ships."

Once more the deadline elapsed without action. Somerville had wanted to give the French a last chance and allow Captain Holland, who had been meeting with Gensoul aboard the *Dunkerque*, to get clear of the harbor. Now, the British ships were cruising eastward at 20 knots, about 17,500 yards northwest of the hemmed-in French flotilla. Unable to stall any longer, Somerville ordered "Anvil"—the code word to open fire.

A few minutes before 6 p.m., flashes and billowing smoke erupted from the offshore battleships. It was 125 years since Waterloo, the last time the British had fired at the French.

With frightening, freight-train clatter, the first salvo of 15-inch shells ended a 20-second arc in huge geysers just outside the breakwater. Real battle had descended upon Mers-el-Kebir. Four French seaplanes skimmed across the harbor, past British aircraft flying identical missions, all spotting the fall of shots for their respective battlewagons.

Provence, aiming her 13-inch guns between *Dunkerque*'s masts, was the first French vessel to retaliate—1½ minutes after Somerville opened the battle. Gensoul in the meantime had told his battleship captains to break out of the harbor—*Strasbourg* would lead, followed by *Dunkerque*, then the others.

The opposing commanders notified their respective admiralties in different terms entirely—Somerville: "Am engaging *enemy*." Gensoul: "Combat engaged with *British forces*."

Captain Louis Collinet had *Strasbourg* underway in seconds. British shells, each packing a ton of explosives, slammed into water exactly at the spot where the 703.5-foot ship had been moored moments before. Part of this second salvo struck the jetty, sweeping away dock crews and hitting a tugboat.

Dunkerque also slipped free, then abruptly shuddered as a shell slammed into the aft section, damaging the steering mechanism. Next came a devastating trio of 15-inch projectiles. They struck Gensoul's flagship, knocking out *Dunkerque*'s No. 2 main turret, cutting electrical power and igniting a boiler-room fire. Two more shells that tore into the big ship

French Warships Hounded

As Force H headed for Mers-el-Kebir on July 2, other players in the Operation Catapult drama were on the move, too. The detention of French warships in British ports—code-named Grasp—was a high-priority item. Soon ensnared were two battleships, five cruisers, nine destroyers, seven submarines and other vessels in the southern English ports of Portsmouth and Plymouth, and in Gibraltar, Malta and Singapore.

The seizures in the last three ports, involving only three warships, were easily accomplished. The Portsmouth operation went without bloodshed, with many Frenchmen desiring to become British subjects and to continue the fight on the British side. There were two noteworthy incidents at Plymouth, however.

Soon after an armed British boarding party climbed into *Surcouf*—at 3,252 tons the world's largest submarine—at 3 a.m. on July 3, 1940, a fight broke out. Three Britons and a French officer were killed; a Frenchman and a Britisher were wounded. They were Catapult's first casualties.

Officers of the nearby *Mistral*, obedient to their orders, opened the vessel's scuttles. They reversed their action only when the British boarding officer said that if the destroyer went down, so would her crew.

Treated as prisoners of war, the vast majority of the 18,500 French officers and sailors rounded up in Britain angrily opted for repatriation to occupied France rather than enrollment in the Free French movement.

French antisubmarine patrol ships seized in a British port, later to fight for DeGaulle and the Allies.

At Alexandria, Egypt, Vice Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham was instructed to seize a battleship, four cruisers, three destroyers and smaller vessels under Vice Admiral René Godfroy, whose situation differed from Gensoul's at Mers-el-Kebir in two ways: The French were in a British-controlled port from which they had been operating under British command, and the Cunningham-Godfroy relationship was excellent and personal as well as professional.

Opposed to London's proposed hostile takeover, Cunningham stretched his orders to arrive at a gentleman's agreement with his French counterpart. The British would not seize the French ships; in turn, the French would unload their fuel oil and place their cannon breech locks and torpedo firing pins in the French consulate ashore.

The peace at Alexandria was almost upset when the French learned of the tragedy at Mers-el-Kebir. But cool heads prevailed and a detailed formal agreement covering the ships in Alexandria was signed by both admirals on July 7. The deal permitted Cunningham to lead his Mediterranean Fleet to sea to fight the war's first major engagement between belligerent fleets—the action off Calabria on July 9 which established British supremacy over the Italian Navy.

Vice Admiral Georges Robert had France's only aircraft carrier, along with a cruiser, three auxiliary cruisers, a training ship and other vessels, under his command in the French West Indies. Aboard the flattop *Béarn* were 106 American-made airplanes and a quantity of gold bullion. They were spared British "hostile action," but effectively immobilized through diplomatic pressure and the denial of fuel oil. At one point, there was the serio-comic spectacle of British warships blockading the French island of Martinique while, farther out, American naval units warily eyed the British.

The gargantuan 38,500-ton French battleship *Jean Bart*, lying at Casablanca atop Africa's northwest bulge, was reprieved because she was not ready to sail. The British were satisfied with keeping her penned in. That the "unfinished" battleship wasn't as helpless as she seemed was demonstrated when, before being pounded into submission, she unleashed her 15-inch guns against the U.S. battlewagon *Massachusetts* during the Allied invasion of Morocco on November 8, 1942.

mercifully failed to explode. *Dunkerque* drifted until hand steering and power from undamaged boilers enabled the helmsman to steer her away from the zeroed-in breakwater. Using auxiliary power and human muscle, the battleship resumed lobbing 13-inch shells toward *Hood* and smaller-caliber ordnance at circling British airplanes. At 6:13, *Dunkerque* dropped anchor near the shore opposite the mole. She had managed to get off about 40 big shells.

Ship and shore-based battery rounds splashed dangerously close to Force H, effectively covering *Strasbourg*'s dash for the harbor entrance. The British were treated to an eerie waterspout-display of reds, blues, yellow-and-greens since their opponents were using colored explosives for accuracy-spotting.

Back at Mers-el-Kebir, however, the 25-year-old *Provence*'s 10 primary guns, two in each of five turrets, belched out 13-inch projectiles as she swung left toward the open sea. She was passing sister ship *Bretagne* just before 6 o'clock when the latter took a British salvo aft. Almost instantly, fire and smoke mushroomed hundreds of feet skyward. By 6:07, her stern awash, *Bretagne* was ablaze from bridge to stern. Another two minutes and, spitting steam and black clouds, she turned onto her starboard side and sank with a roaring, gurgling hiss—977 of her 1,133-man crew went down with her.

It appeared that *Provence*, ducking thundering columns of oily water and shrapnel, was going to make it. Then, at 6:03, luck deserted her. Pausing to await *Dunkerque*'s passage, she inadvertently placed herself beneath an incoming British round. The explosion blew open *Provence*'s stern. Ablaze and spewing oil, and soon heavy with water allowed in to combat the fires, the stricken ship slued to starboard and beached at the 5-fathom line about two-thirds of a mile beyond the smoke-cloaked *Dunkerque*. The *Commandant Teste*, the fifth and least important combat vessel at the breakwater, escaped virtually untouched. She proceeded to rescue survivors from the badly roiled water.

Mogador was leading the super-destroyers out when she was forced to a slow to avoid a tug. At that instant, a 15-inch shell struck her stern. A gigantic fireball blew off the back part of the warship, but the after engine-room bulkhead held. Helpless without rudder and screws, she was towed, afire, to the beach. The five other destroyers darted past unhurt. Perhaps 20 minutes after starting out, *Strasbourg* also emerged miraculously intact, except for insignificant shrapnel scars—a gray wraith materializing out of the smoke and gathering blackness.

Somerville noted that "after [our] firing a total of 36 fifteen-inch salvoes, the fire from the French ships died down but fire from the fort was becoming increasingly accurate." Although the French scored no direct hits, shrapnel chipped into *Hood* and wounded two. Force H made a precautionary 180-degree turn to port and laid a protective smoke screen. The turn cost Somerville any chance of catching *Strasbourg*.

The British ceased fire shortly after 6 p.m.—about 10 minutes after the opening salvo.

The battle was not yet over—at 6:25, six British Swordfish from 818 Squadron, each loaded with 12 bombs, left the *Ark Royal* to finish off the French capital ships. Minutes later, Somerville received confirmation that *Strasbourg* was escaping eastward with a large number of destroyers (ships from Oran had joined the Mers-el-Kebir group). He diverted his biplanes and their three Skua escorts to the fleeing flotilla.

Spotting five French Curtiss Hawk 75As attacking a spotter aircraft, the two-man Skuas broke away to the rescue. In the ensuing dogfight, a British plane spun into the ocean—the second plane lost that day—and the American-built Hawks turned homeward. The remaining Skuas rejoined the Swordfish. After a couple more inconclusive aerial mêlées with the French, the carrier planes finally sighted their target.

TOP: Unable to negotiate a satisfactory settlement with Vice Admiral Gensoul, Captain Cedric S. Holland leaves the battle cruiser Dunkerque. *Afterward, he asked to be relieved of command of the* Ark Royal. *ABOVE:* Dunkerque *slipped her moorings and fired 40 big shells at the British before their salvos disabled her, forcing her to drop anchor near shore.*

Shortly after 7:30, the gawky, canvas-and-wood Swordfish—aptly nicknamed stringbags—dropped from their 11,000-foot altitude. They clattered in over the slightly hazy, waveless ocean, one after the other, with the setting sun behind them. Their bombs plummeted from 4,000 feet at 10-second intervals as antiaircraft bursts sent them scurrying away at sea level. A sharp, 28-knot swerve enabled *Strasbourg* to avoid the closest drop, a 250-pounder that detonated 75 feet astern.

Two stringbags soon afterward splashed into the water. Their crews were saved by the destroyer *Wrestler*, which earlier had unsuccessfully challenged *Strasbourg*'s sortie from the harbor. En route back to their carrier, the Skuas shot out one engine of a French seaplane that was attacking a destroyer.

Battleship Bretagne *burns and slowly settles alongside the seaplane tender* Commandant Teste, *which survived the British bombardment of Mers-el-Kebir virtually unscathed.*

Force H was by this time also pounding in pursuit of *Strasbourg*. At the moment the Swordfish were starting their bombing runs, the pursuing British ships came upon the colonial sloop *Rigault de Genouilly* steaming westward close inshore. Unable to keep up with *Strasbourg*, the smaller French warship was returning to its base of Oran. Several shells slapped into the hapless vessel as Force H passed by. (The next day, the damaged sloop had turned around again and was sunk by the submarine *Pandora* just as she was about to reach safety at Algiers.) French destroyers, submarines and aircraft wound up the action of July 3 with unrewarded stabs at *Hood* and the submersible *Proteus*.

At 8:20, with a solar afterglow marking the horizon behind, Force H gave up the sea chase, sent a final air strike against *Strasbourg* and turned about. Thirty-five minutes later, six Swordfish pounced from the night sky for torpedo passes against the French battleship. There were no hits.

Elsewhere, any hopes Gensoul had of sailing the damaged *Dunkerque* and *Provence* out under cover of darkness were to no avail. Neither was in any shape to move. The badly listing *Dunkerque* settled into the sand near the shore as her crew opened the sea cocks. Only the *Commandant Teste* was able to steam away.

Force H entered Gibraltar harbor the next evening, July 4. *Strasbourg* soon reached the southern French naval base of Toulon, more than 850 miles to the northeast. In ten minutes of shooting, the British had disabled 100,000 of the French Navy's 590,000 tons.

Fleet Admiral Francois Darlan, the outraged French naval minister, immediately dispatched orders to "attack all British ships met" and alluded to the historical parallel of Copenhagen. In 1807, a similar demand was made to intern Danish warships in British ports, although the two countries were not at war; the ultimatum was rejected, and the British attacked the ships anchored in Copenhagen harbor.

The day after the assault on Mers-el-Kebir, France asked Germany to suspend the restrictive Article 8 of the armistice terms so it could go after the British. Hitler readily agreed. A few French planes bombed Gibraltar during the wee hours of July 5. They failed to hit their primary target, Force H. Later that day, nudged by the de facto French head of state, Marshal Henri Pétain, Darlan watered down his original order. British ships now would be fired upon only if they approached to within 20 miles of French installations.

A French press communiqué that contained the sentence, "The damage to *Dunkerque* is minor and will be quickly repaired," caused Gensoul to throw up his arms. Why not send the British an engraved invitation! That same night, London warned Somerville that if he was not sure *Dunkerque* was *hors de combat* "for at least a year," he should attack Mers-el-Kebir again.

Sure enough, just before dawn on July 6, *Ark Royal* launched three waves of torpedo-laden Swordfish from about 90 miles northwest of Mers-el-Kebir. With precision maneuvering and timing, the first six biplanes swooped in over the battered breakwater as a blinding sun rose over the surface haze behind them. The 820 Squadron made its drop—six lethal cylinders sped at 27 knots, 12 feet beneath the surface, toward stranded *Dunkerque*. The squadron leader reported four hits. Twenty minutes later, three Swordfish from 810 Squadron, followed by another trio from the same squadron, flew in through heavy gunfire. One torpedo detonated the depth charges on an auxiliary vessel tied up alongside the battleship. A volcanic eruption of water, fire, smoke and debris blossomed upward and left a huge hole in *Dunkerque*'s side.

Force H turned back toward Gibraltar. Gensoul was left to preside over a mass funeral—1,297 of his men had died; another 351 were wounded.

For Somerville, who considered Mers-el-Kebir a "filthy job," there remained a piece of unfinished business, which had been deferred because of the second strike on *Strasbourg*. The spanking new 38,500-ton *Richelieu*—armed with eight 15-inch and nine 6-inch cannons—was in Dakar. She had fled to this westernmost port in Africa just as the Germans closed in on her home territory of France. *Richelieu*'s captain had also turned down an invitation to join the British.

Shortly after 3 a.m. on July 8, a small motorboat entered Dakar harbor and, in the dark, dropped four objects beneath the stern of the anchored French behemoth. Suspicious lookouts could find nothing amiss. Just over an hour later, reveille sounded and the battleship prepared to start a dash north to Casablanca, where her uncompleted sister *Jean Bart* was docked. At dawn, six Swordfish suddenly appeared and dropped their torpedoes. A strike aft of the big ship produced an uncharacteristically vast explosion that lifted *Richelieu*'s stern from the sea. The detonating torpedo's shock wave had set off the four depth charges deposited earlier by the small boat; the water had been too shallow for the charges to go off. Both the motorboat and planes came from the British light carrier *Hermes* steaming some 30 miles offshore.

The damaged battlewagon was towed, stern low, to a pier where she could serve as a floating battery. (*Richelieu*'s revenge came 2½ months later when her guns helped repel a joint Anglo-Free French landing expedition. One of the

white-ensigned warships she damaged then was the battleship *Resolution*, which had participated in the surprise attack on Mers-el-Kebir.)

Other phases of Operation Catapult were unfolding in England and Egypt even while Gensoul's Atlantic Raiding Fleet was being pounded by Somerville's cannons, but it was Mers-el-Kebir that took the limelight. As one historian pointed out, with the French ships "lay the wreckage of Anglo-French friendship." In addition to providing "perfidious Albion" grist for the Nazi propaganda mill, the attack both strengthened Pétain's Vichy government and threw it into Hitler's arms, stiffening French resistance in North Africa and the Middle East. Although the Vichy regime stopped short of declaring war, it did sever diplomatic relations with Britain. As for the Free French point of view, an embittered General Charles de Gaulle saw the British action as "a terrible blow to our hopes—it at once showed in the recruitment of volunteers."

Churchill—who dubbed the decision to launch Catapult "the most unnatural and painful in which I have ever been concerned"—nevertheless foresaw that the action would impress the world by demonstrating that "here was this Britain which so many had counted down and out . . . striking ruthlessly at her dearest friends of yesterday." As Churchill also said, "It was plain that the British War Cabinet feared nothing and would stop at nothing."

The United States generally approved the British attack as proof of Britain's unwavering resolve. Indicative, in fact, of an unpublicized American role in the affair was a note from the British ambassador in Washington to President Franklin Roosevelt on July 4, 1940: "You will see that Winston Churchill has taken the action in regard to the French Fleet which we discussed and you approved."

Ships were not the only casualties of Mers-el-Kebir. After Vice Admiral Sir Dudley North, the Gibraltar base commander, summed up his peers' views of the raid in a negative note to his admiralty, he was relieved of his command (three months later under another pretext). Captain Holland, who literally sweated through hours of negotiations with the French on July 3, asked to be relieved of his command of *Ark Royal*, effectively ending a promising naval career. Gensoul became a "non-person" in his navy and retired in 1942. Somerville, however, went on to lead Force H in the Mediterranean and later helped destroy the German battleship *Bismarck*.

The harassed French Fleet concentrated itself at Toulon, where 77 vessels were scuttled or otherwise disabled when the Germans tried to seize them there on November 27, 1942. They included Mers-el-Kebir survivors *Strasbourg*, *Dunkerque*, *Provence*, *Mogador* and *Commandant Teste*. Among British ships, *Ark Royal*, the Royal Navy's most famous ship (she had survived seven close calls during the first 10 months of the war), was sunk by a U-boat in November 1941. *Hood* was to fire her guns in anger only one more time after Mers-el-Kebir, just before she was blown apart by the German *Bismarck*'s fifth salvo in May 1941—only three men from a crew of 1,419 were picked up. *Richelieu* ultimately fought alongside the Allies.

Whether or not Operation Catapult deprived the Axis of powerful fleet units is a moot point. What is certain is that the decision to cut the Gordian knot was one of the most controversial Churchill ever made. It was a step harmful to French pride and honor. It did severe damage to Anglo-French relations. But surely, too, it did show the world the depths of British resolution in a moment of dire peril. □

Wilfred P. Deac is based among the great libraries and documentary centers of Washington, D.C. As further reading, please try: The Deadly Stroke, *by Warren Tute;* The French Navy in World War II, *by P. Auphan and J. Mondal; and* Years of Deadly Peril.

TOP: The old battleship Lorraine *was one of the few French capital ships to turn herself in at the Allied port of Alexandria. In August 1944, she would help support the Allied invasion of Provence. MIDDLE: Admiral James F. Somerville called the attack on Mers-el-Kebir "a filthy job." It certainly remains one of the most controversial decisions of Churchill's career. ABOVE: The burning* Brétagne *keels over and goes down. For many Frenchmen, it was one of the war's most indelible—and infamous—images.*

A German U-boat crew keeps a weather eye open for the ever-present threat of Allied warships, or the swifter threat of enemy aircraft. (INSET): On July 18, 1943, U-134 encountered a most unlikely aerial nemesis: A U.S. Navy blimp.

Nightly Routine Shattered

The U-boat and the U.S. Navy blimp met by surprise. Each fired its armament at the other—neither would ever be the same again.

By Robert J. Seese

Wafting through the heavy tropical air, U.S. Navy Airship King 74 was a dark shadow over the lightly swelling water of Cay Sal Bank. The hour was close to midnight, and soon the lights of Cuba's coastline would blink into view—a signal for the blimp to turn east, down the Bahama Passage, in its nightly routine of submarine-hunting.

The K-74's two 425-horsepower Pratt and Whitney radial engines created a churning vibration that permeated the slightly swaying aluminum crew car. About the size of a bus, the gondola, as most Lighter-Than-Air (LTA) Navy men continued to call it, was tucked beneath a gas-inflated envelope 250 feet long and 76 feet high. This airship was quite unlike the giant, rigid dirigibles in the image of the ill-fated *Hindenburg*, whose grotesquely twisted and smoldering skeletal remains fell to earth at the base of a mooring mast in New Jersey six years earlier. Rather, the fat, cigar-shaped, non-rigid envelope of a Navy blimp contained no metal framework—and no explosive hydrogen. Constructed from lightly rubberized fine-grade cotton, it was kept from collapsing by the pressure of 425,000 cubic feet of non-flammable helium, tightly compressed by adjustable air-filled ballonets.

The K-74's ten-man crew found the muted roar of the engines reassuring, even though the near-neutral buoyancy of their fragile craft alone would prevent it from instantly falling into the sea after a loss of power. Instead, a powerless airship could be brought to a controlled landing through a tricky combination of venting helium and dumping fuel while maintaining ballonet pressure with the amidships, gasoline-powered emergency blower that blimp crews called a "putput."

The pilot's compartment was forward, semi-enclosed by radio equipment and the navigating position. On this night, July 18, 1943, Ensign Darsley Eversley was in the left seat and maintaining steady pressure on the aircraft-type yoke in front of him. A blimp, like the enemy U-boats it stalked, maintained direction through the movement of rudder and elevator surfaces located on stabilizing fins. A blimp pilot used the yoke to direct the airship to climb or descend and, with rudder pedals, could steer the blimp port or starboard. However, maintaining that dual control for any extended period was so fatiguing that standard Navy procedures designated rudderman responsibilities to the co-pilot. On this flight, the co-pilot position belonged to APIc (Aviation Pilot First Class) J. Jandrowitz.

Standing between them was Lieutenant Nelson G. Grills. Binoculars aimed out the forward windows, he searched for the ominous, shark-like lines that would expose a German U-boat lurking in the dark sea ahead. Inside the gondola, the dim red of the floor lights reflected from the highly polished toes of his British-style Wellingtons—the slip-on, three-quarter leather boots that had become a distinguishing trademark of American flyers.

Grills had convinced his wife the expensive Wellingtons were necessary because they could be easily kicked off in a crash at sea. In reality, to avoid scuffing them up, Grills never wore his Wellingtons on patrol. That evening, his wife, having noticed the boots in the closet, dutifully delivered them to her "forgetful" husband. As events turned out, Grills would be very glad she did.

With 430 patrol hours to his credit, the 31-year-old lawyer-turned-LTA pilot was not exactly a novice to sub hunting, yet no patrol he commanded had ever actually come across an enemy submarine. Lieutenant Grills, in fact, doubted that his brief pilot's training at Lakehurst had sufficiently prepared him to be master over the rapidly changing moods of an airship. Grills considered himself competent and more in the rudiments of navigation, the calculation of drift, the mysteries of air currents and the phenomena of weather, but only barely passable as a LTA pilot. He had been assigned to Blimpron (Squadron) Z-21 at nearby Richmond (Fla.) Naval Air Station as a command pilot/navigator without so much as a checkout ride.

All things considered, including a worldwide war, Grills was forced to conclude it was pretty much a fluke that on this

U-134 was a C-class model of the Type VII boats, the workhorses of the German submarine fleet. Her after platform had a 20mm antiaircraft gun as shown above; later, she was to have been fitted with a more potent 37mm weapon.

warm summer night he was standing "on deck" in command of a $250,000 airship of the U.S. Navy.

A 1937 graduate of the University of Indiana Law School, followed by a master's from Columbia Law, Nelson Grills was working in Washington as an attorney for the Treasury Department when the war started. He had pulled every string he could to get out of a government job classified as critical and into the Navy. When he finally succeeded, much to his chagrin, the Navy placed him in a legal section reviewing government contracts. Determined to see action, Nelson convinced a fellow officer that they both should volunteer for submarine duty. But Grill's uncorrected eyesight was classified as borderline, and he failed the mechanical aptitude portion of the written tests. His reluctant buddy was accepted.

A couple of months later, when Grills decided that if he couldn't get subs he would try for blimps, Rear Adm. Charles E. "Rosey" Rosendahl had the beginnings of four airship squadrons for the U.S. Navy's Fleet Airship Wing One in place—at Lakehurst, N.J.; South Weymouth, Mass.; Weeksville, N.C.; and Glynco, Ga. Moffett Field in California, recently turned back to the Navy by the Army, was slated to headquarter Fleet Airship Wing Three. On desolate land a few miles south of Miami, Fla., Naval Air Station Richmond was under construction. Richmond was to be headquarters for Fleet Airship Wing Two, with the mission of patrolling the Gulf Sea Frontier.

It took several trys, but a Navy doctor finally approved a determined Nelson Grills for airships, saying, "You can be blind and fly a blimp!" It was then that Lieutenant Grills at last succeeded in scuttling his desk and headed to Lakehurst for LTA pilot training. Now, in the summer of 1943, he was an "old hand" at sub patrol—almost.

Then came the night of July 18. The preflight check list complete, the ground crew had released the nose coupler and pushed K-74 away from the mooring mast at 7 p.m. Blue smoke belched from the exhaust stacks as Grills ordered the engines started. With her fuel tanks topped off and heavy with a full crew and supplies, K-74 taxied away, turned into the wind and performed a routine "on-the-wheel-run" to take off from the huge blacktop expanse that surrounded the mammoth maintenance hangers at Richmond. Immediately, two crew members headed for the pantry. Brewing coffee's aroma filled the gondola by the time K-74 leveled off at 500 feet on a course that would take her across the Florida Keys into "Richmond Patrol Area One."

Three blimps from Squadron 21 were up on routine patrol that night, each assigned to a specific patrol corridor and each to be "on station" from 30 minutes before dark to 30 minutes before dawn. The squadron was seriously short of officers, temporarily making it necessary for command pilots to rotate among the enlisted crews.

Because this was the first time Nelson Grills had worked with this particular crew, he called his men to general quarters about 30 minutes into the flight and again an hour or so later.

Their K-74 carried two Mark 17 bombs with Mark 24 depth fuses set for 50 feet—depth rather than impact bombs, because it was anticipated the target would always be a submerged sub.

Standing instructions when a blimp sighted an enemy sub running on the surface were to pull off—up wind and out of range—and request assistance in a "plain language" transmission. The only other armament on the practically defense-

A rare photo of a U-boat, taken by a blimp crewmember with his own camera off the U.S. coast. Standard procedure for blimps when contact was made was to report the submarine's position and avoid combat.

less K-class blimp was a .50-caliber bow-mounted machine gun with 60-round belts loaded in a sequence of two armor-piercing and one tracer.

Of particular concern to Grills were the 20-year-old bomb release mechanisms controlled by bombardier AMM2c (Aviation Machinists Mate Second Class) Isodore Stessel. While Grills was aware new bomb releases were available, K-74 still carried the antiquated L-21A (1921 Army) model. It was designed to allow the lever to move easily from the initial position to a midway "selective" or "safety" stop position. To continue into "salvo" and actually drop bombs, the bombardier was required to press inward on a latch at the top of the lever. Grills was aware it was a procedure easily fumbled, but he verified that Stessel seemed to understand it.

At 11:46 p.m., ARM3c (Aviation Radioman's Mate Third Class) R.H. Bourne, monitoring the ASG radar, announcedhe had picked up a weak and intermittent blip—range eight miles and slightly to starboard. Grills immediately ordered a course that would intercept the blip position and called battle stations. He wrote out a dispatch for radioman (ARM3c) J.F. Rice, *incorrectly* coding the blip coordinates as 23° 59′ North and 80° *11′* West, rather than 80° *49′* West. Seaman First Class G. Eckert moved to the gunner's position, bombardier Stessel to the bomb window, photography mate (ARM3c) J.M. Gidding to the forward lookout position, and S1c J.W. Kowalski to the aft lookout position. Mechanic (AMM3c) J.L. Schmidt continued monitoring the engine instrument panels.

Soon seeing a surfaced submarine abeam and about ½ mile to port, several members of the crew, almost in unison and in a tone of near-disbelief, announced, "There is a sub out there!" Immediately, too, the crew was into a debate on the submarine's nationality. There were not supposed to be any American submarines in the area, but Grills knew U.S. sub commanders were notorious for failing to disclose their position when returning to Key West. With the possibility of it being a "friendly" so strong, identification had to be positive.

Circling at little more than idle speed, the airship's crewmen examined the sub's moonlit silhouette. It appeared to have the long, sleek shape and the conning tower break and rail of a German VII-type U-boat. There was an aft deck gun—long, low and separated from the conning tower—but no forward gun. The crew thought a German sub should have a forward gun.

Years after the war ended, it would be learned that the sub they were studying was the workhorse of the German Navy, a C-class version of the 9,000-mile range VII type—specifically, boat U-134. Commissioned on July 26, 1941, U-134 originally carried a quick-firing 88mm gun forward and a single 20mm antiaircraft weapon on a deck platform just aft of the conning tower. In early 1943, the large forward gun of U-134 was removed and the "wintergarden" platform at the back of the conning tower enlarged to accommodate dual 20mm antiaircraft guns. The aft gun platform was modified to accept a newly developed 37mm antiaircraft weapon. When it was determined that production of the 37mm would be delayed until October of 1943, the original 20mm gun was temporarily remounted.

It was the bad luck of K-74 to encounter one of the very first U-boats modified to provide better protection against air attack.

Not yet satisfied that the sub was German, but believing it probably was, Grills momentarily considered pulling off and

requesting assistance. However, prior to flight time, the briefing officer had told them two unescorted American merchant tankers would be leaving the Northwest Providence Channel and steaming south. That night, by Grill's calculations, those two ships could reach the area at any time and would be easy prey for an enemy sub. He decided the only sure way to identify the submarine was to make a run over it. If it submerged—the usual evasive action of a U-boat—its identity would be positively established and he could order K-74's depth bombs dropped. Grills weighed the "slim" odds that the sub might open fire when it spotted them, but decided, "better one blimp than two tankers."

Coming in from the north and down-moon at 1,700 RPM (about 47 knots) and an altitude of 250 feet, K-74 approached the sub's stern undetected. While we can only guess, it is reasonable to assume that for a time the noise from the U-boat's engines masked the sound of the approaching blimp. U-134 was probably equipped with a "Metox" device to read the radar pulses emitted from approaching air or surface craft. We now know that many U-boat commanders had little confidence in Metox and kept the unit switched off most of the time to squelch the terrible shrieking sounds the detection equipment was prone to produce even when a radar-equipped craft was not in the area.

When K-74 was about 200 yards away, however, the new weaponry of the German U-boat started hurtling antiaircraft shells with deadly accuracy. Grills gave the order to commence return fire. A double stream of tracers poured from the sub into the blimp with a single stream answering. K-74 stayed on the attack course as round after round thudded into her envelope. Seaman Eckert maintained a steady staccato with his 50-caliber machine gun, filling the gondola with the heavy smell of cordite, the rattle of expended cases, and the steady "ping ping" of flying belt links. The deadly firing from the sub stopped for a few seconds, then resumed. K-74's fifty spit out a few more rounds, then went silent, its ammo belt empty. Eckert loaded another belt, slammed a round into the chamber and resumed firing. Grills ordered Stessel to drop the depth bombs.

As the nose of the blimp passed over the sub, Eckert's gun would not depress sufficiently to keep his target in view. Throughout the battle, radioman Bourne repeatedly sent the special squadron message, "OFU," meaning "am being fired upon." Later, the crew would learn that due to a high level of atmospheric static the emergency message was not received by NAS Richmond. Fortunately, it was heard by Navy Airship K-32, scouting in an adjacent patrol corridor, and understood by Richmond through K-32's relay.

As K-74 came off the target, enemy fire continued ripping through the envelope and smashing into the engines. Miraculously, not a single round had struck the gondola, but a dirty red flame flickered from the starboard engine.

Eversley throttled back to try and regain control as the ship lurched upward. It climbed to about 1,000 feet—stabilized momentarily—then started a clumsy plunge to the sea. The port engine had stopped, its prop windmilling. Mechanic Schmidt hit the flaming starboard engine with a blast of CO_2 and went to work trying to get the port engine restarted. The starboard engine burst into flames a second time. Schmidt gave it another shot of CO_2.

Because he had observed no explosions, Grills quickly checked the bomb release levers and found both in the midway position. Today, Nelson Grills recalls: "I was terribly upset, but the bombardier swore the bombs released and I knew that these old releases sometimes crept back into the center position after the bombs were away. Now, we do know for certain that at least one of the depth bombs was dropped."

Grills, taking over the pilot's position, dumped both fuel slip tanks in an effort to slow the ship's descent. While he could not see the damage in the blimp's skin above, it was obvious the ship was losing helium at an alarming rate and that in all probability the envelope had started to collapse. The crew attempted to start the auxiliary blower, but the effort was unsuccessful. Schmidt got the port engine going, but by then K-74 was only a few feet from the water's surface. Fortunately, the sagging envelope retained sufficient buoyancy to allow the impact to be fairly gentle.

Immediately, water rushed into the gondola. Nearly five decades later, Nelson Grills smiles as he says, "I wish I could say that I ordered the ship abandoned in true Navy fashion, but what really happened is that someone hollered, 'Let's get the hell outta here,' and I said, 'OK!'"

The Blimp's Evolvement

The often-maligned blimp of the 1930s and 1940s did not slam through the skies like a fighter or bomber, but rather rode the air more like a ship rode the sea, albeit not always smoothly. In rough air, blimps frequently lurched, reeled, yawed and staggered along. Hence, HTA (Heavier-Than-Air) pilots tended to refer to blimps by less than distinguished names: air scows, gas bags, rubber cows and drunken elephants, to mention some of the least flattering.

Once crude death traps, non-rigid airships had progressed by the late 1930s into wondrous general-utility air machines that made perfect observation platforms. They could scout great areas of the sea, cruise for 40 hours at speeds of around 40 mph, refuel from surface craft, cut their motors and use air currents for power, or drop their sea anchor and sit silent and nearly motionless for study of a suspicious shadow in the water.

Blimps also performed well in assignments calling for search and rescue, aerial photography and mine-spotting.

Even with such positive points in their favor, when America's hopes for peace were blasted away at Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Navy had only ten blimps—four of them too small for sea duty. This left two tired old TC ships inherited from the Army Signal Corps in 1937, and four of the new Goodyear-built K-class blimps. With congressional authorization for 200 more airships, longtime LTA (Lighter-Than-Air) advocate Rear Adm. Charles E. "Rosey" Rosendahl was assigned the job of establishing LTA wings—it would be well into 1943 before the blimps necessary to turn his "paper" force into total reality could be built and their crews trained.

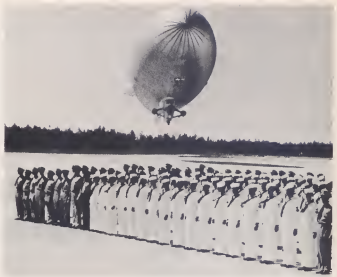
Had it not been for the airship experience gained by Goodyear Aircraft Corporation through the construction and operation of civilian advertising blimps in the years between the world wars, building an effective military LTA force would have taken even longer. While the Navy's LTA fleet was struggling to become airborne, Japanese subs threatened West Coast shipping and Hitler's U-boats roamed up and down the Atlantic coast almost unchallenged.

For the LTA Service, the WWII years were unquestionably a brief period of glory. Operating from more than 50 primary and auxiliary stations, blimps performed surveillance and escort duties over millions of square miles of the Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf, Caribbean and Mediterranean coastlines and waters. LTA personnel reached a peak of 1,500 air officers, 700 ground officers, 3,000

Stessel tossed the life raft out of the sinking airship, but in all the excitement failed to secure a line. Lieutenant Grills grabbed the metal "confidential" container and dropped it overboard as the crewmen inflated their life vests and jumped into the tepid water. Grills started to follow the last of his crew out the door, but then decided that, as long as the gondola was afloat, he had to stay and try to keep the radar equipment from falling into enemy hands.

Grills returned to the pilot's seat and waited as the sea water rose around him. When the gondola was nearly fully submerged, he reluctantly kicked off his Wellingtons, felt his way underwater through the darkened gondola, and went out the doorway. Surfacing, he could see none of the crew. Thinking they had left in the life raft and believing the hissing and sagging envelope would soon collapse and sink, he swam some distance away. Grills attempted to continue watching over his ship, not sure what he could do if the Germans did appear, but the current was strong and he drifted farther and farther away, soon losing all sight of K-74.

Unseen by Grills in the darkness, their unsecured life raft gone, the nine crewmen first swam some distance away from the wreckage, then returned. They gathered at the stern of the half-submerged blimp, hanging onto one of the horizontal stabilizers as K-74 wallowed in the sea like an injured walrus. When the envelope was almost completely underwater, the crew abandoned the wreckage and joined arms in an outward facing circle. Moments later the final part of K-74, her tail cap, slipped out of sight. In another minute or so, the crew heard the sound of an explosion. One of the ship's depth bombs had not been dropped. Tearing away from its release wire as the gondola broke up, the armed bomb detonated when the wreckage reached a depth of 50 feet.



The ground crew required to keep a U.S. Navy blimp flying stands at attention for inspection while one of their charges floats serenely above, clean enough to pass muster itself.

At 8 o'clock the next morning, the crew was spotted by Squadron Commander A.L. "Al" Cope on board the Wing's Grumman G-44 Widgeon J4F amphibian aircraft. Cope had recognized that the coded position provided by K-74 as she started her attack must be incorrect, since it placed the sub in very shallow water on Cal Sal Bank. He decided the proper position was the complement of the minutes given (60–11=49). It was to that correct coordinate that he proceeded at first light. Hesitant to land in what had become very choppy water, his Widgeon pilot then directed the American destroyer *Dahlgren*, on search about 10 miles away, to the scene.

Bombardier Stessel, seasick and vomiting, had started drifting behind. Ensign Eversley, fearful he would lose sight of Stessel, decided to swim out to him. When Eversley was about 20 yards away, Stessel yelled, "Shark!" Eversley saw a fin break water, then Stessel doubled up and disappeared. Seconds later, Stessel surfaced close enough for Eversley to see blood on his face, but he disappeared again. This time he did not resurface. A half hour later, the remaining crew were safely on board the *Dahlgren*.

Drifting alone, Nelson Grills saw several Navy surface craft during the day—one passing so close it almost ran him over. Grills waved and shouted, but to no avail. Blimp K-32 passed overhead at 6:15 p.m. It was heading away when a crew member, sent to the rear quarters because he had been "goofing off" on duty, spotted Grills. Circling, K-32 directed surface craft 657, a subchaser, to Grills' location.

A blimp on convoy duty. Not one ship was lost by a convoy that had blimp escort.

enlisted air crewmen and 7,200 enlisted ground personnel. During the war, Navy blimps flew 58,600 operational missions, logged more than 550,000 flying hours and escorted some 89,000 ships in convoy.

Never did a convoy with a blimp escort lose a single ship!

When the hostilities ended in 1945, the Navy's airship service was reduced to two squadrons, plus a training unit at Lakehurst. During and following the war, larger and more capable blimps were developed. The most modern, the N-Class, became operational in 1951. A giant non-rigid, it progressed from the ZPG1W to the ZPG3W—a 425-foot, radar-domed blimp with a capacity of 1,516,000 cubic feet and powered by two radial engines of 1,525 horsepower each.

Unfortunately, ZPG3W was destined to become the final crash statistic of Navy LTA. Leaving Lakehurst on July 6, 1960, to search for two missing civilian sailing yachts, ZPG3W nosed into the ocean about 15 miles off the coast. The crash was declared to have been caused by "pilot error"—only three of the 21-man crew survived.

The last flight of Navy LTA took place on August 31, 1962. Passengers included retired Vice Adm. Charles E. Rosendahl. As an airship of the U.S. Navy approached a mooring mast for the final time, hundreds of former blimp crewmen, invited from all over the United States, were present to assist in the docking.

For three decades since, LTA has remained an adventure of yesteryear. Now, it appears blimps may waft into the skies of modern aviation once again—Airships International, a company based in Kissimmee, Fla., has announced it will shortly begin construction of two sleek new non-rigid blimps under contract to the U.S. Coast Guard. Perhaps this does not quite signify a return to the glory days of LTA, but for the aviation romantics who love those old airships, it is at least a move in that direction.

R.J.S.

A blimpron floats in formation over its naval air station. Lieutenant Grills' decision to use K-74 as an offensive weapon almost got him court-martialed. Later, it earned him the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Grills was badly sunburned and spent several days in the hospital. He received a hero's welcome from the squadron and learned that Squadron Skipper Al Copes had recommended that "Lieutenant Grills be commended for his daring, aggressive attack under fire which is in keeping with Naval Tradition." But some of the Navy brass believed Grills had acted recklessly and endangered his crew unnecessarily, resulting in the death of one man and the loss of a naval airship. "Nelson, they are thinking of court-martialing you," Cope was forced to inform Lieutenant Grills.

Grills was taken off flying status and assigned to a blimp-maintenance unit. A few months later, the court-martial by then forgotten, he was given the job of overseeing blimp gunnery and technical exercises, and he remained in that capacity to the end of the war.

Years later, military researchers discovered from German records of radio contacts with U-134 that with either gun fire or a depth bomb, K-74 had succeeded in damaging one of U-134's ballast tanks, preventing it from submerging. Forced to run on the surface, U-134 made it across the Atlantic and headed for the Bay of Biscay and the safety of the German sub pens at Bordeaux, France. On August 24, 1943, however, a plane of the 179th RAF Squadron, patrolling off the Province of Pontevedra in northwestern Spain, spotted the surfaced boat in the Bay and sank it. All hands were lost.

Grills left active Navy service in 1945 as a lieutenant commander but later achieved the rank of commander while serving in the Navy Reserves. In 1946, Grills became an instructor at Indiana University's School of Law in Indianapolis. Later, Grills ran unsuccessfully as a mayoral candidate in Indianapolis and served several terms as an Indiana state legislator. Today, Nelson Grills maintains a law practice in Indianapolis.

Prior to leaving active service, Grills was awarded the Purple Heart. "I got it for being sunburned," he jokingly says. More seriously, more than two decades after the battle between K-74 and U-134—after the facts showed that the attack commanded by Nelson Grills had directly contributed to the sinking of German U-boat 134—Grills was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. □

Robert J. Seese of Brooksville, Fla., based his account of the K-74's battle at sea upon official records and personal interviews with the blimp's wartime commander, Nelson G. Grills. Seese reports that many published accounts of the incident are abbreviated, or plain wrong, and Grills "remains amazed that through all these years—and the many references by various authors to the incident—no writer or historian has previously interviewed him."

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Collapse of Empires

The war hastened the foreseeable collapse of the European empire in Asia—then saw a brutal Japanese substitute pass quickly, too.

By Raymond Callahan

One of the most striking consequences of World War II, it is so easy to say now, was the rapid dissolution of the European imperial order that on the eve of war in 1939 still gripped all of Africa and much of Asia. Such a truism may appear obvious as we look back today, but it is useful to remember the observation that if history is well-understood looking backward, it only can be lived going forward.

Putting ourselves in the position of those who in 1940-41 administered and policed European possessions in Asia, it is quite clear that the imperial collapse was not what they (or, indeed, most of those they ruled) expected. Doubts and fears were present, of course, and so was the occasional prescient observer, like George Orwell, who sensed the crumbling of the whole vast edifice. But for most Westerners in Asia the European imperial order was almost a fact of nature, destined to endure, if not forever, then at least until they retired. The mistaken assumption gives a certain poignancy, perhaps, to what is certainly a cautionary tale about the role of the unforeseen and unexpected in human affairs.

When Hitler attacked Poland in 1939, all of South and Southeast Asia—all of what is now India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos—was ruled by Europeans. The sole exception was Thailand, which had retained a precarious independence and was a buffer between the British in Burma and the French in Indochina. In all these imperial dependencies, British, French or Dutch, certain common features could be discerned. All were controlled by bodies of European administrators, few in number but holding all the key appointments—a bureaucratic elite that was the backbone of European rule. At the summit of their hierarchy was a grandly titled governor, governor general, or viceroy, surrounded by the pomp and ceremonial of whose utility in impressing "the natives" the imperial mind was so certain.

Beneath the European governors and their administrative elite were the foot soldiers of empire, the army of locally recruited functionaries—minor civil servants, clerks, policemen, railway workers—without whom the machine would not have functioned. No empire, from those of Alexander and

Major General Jonathan M. Wainright discusses surrender terms with General Masaharu Homma shortly after the surrender of Corregidor, the last American stronghold in the Philippines, on May 6, 1942.

TOP: French troops from Africa and Indochina, captured by the Germans in Italy in 1943, as depicted by German artist Max Ahrens. ABOVE: On October 13, 1945, the youth of Batavia, most armed only with sharpened sticks, rallied to resist the returning Dutch. British warships and aircraft shelled, bombed and strafed them.

Caesar Augustus to those of our own day, has ever been able to function without local help. And that help was forthcoming because the imperial regimes offered their servants rewards, tangible and intangible, sufficient to secure the loyalty of the local personnel.

Moreover, European rule had been in place long enough to seem part of the natural order of things to the peasantry, who formed the overwhelming majority of the population. The balance between the benefits that an alien government conferred and the price it exacted had not yet tipped decisively against continued acceptance. The European, of course, regarded this acceptance as loyalty. It was not, except in a minority of cases (and most of those were individuals with a stake in the imperial structure from which they derived profit, prestige or both). It was simply that there seemed no real alternative to European imperial rule; it was simply, too, that the Europeans, when challenged, had always hitherto emerged victorious. Further, their rule was not impossibly oppressive to most of their subjects much of the time.

If challenged, however, the European rulers depended in the last analysis on their weaponry and their technical skills in its use to sustain their position, and their confidence in their ability to thus maintain their rule seemed very well-grounded. Their first line of defense was the police—locally recruited, with only a few European officers in senior positions, supplemented by efficient intelligence-gathering. (So good were the British police in India at this, that some of the most efficient officers of MI5, Britain's own counterintelligence agency, were recruited from the Indian police.)

Behind the police stood the local soldiers recruited for imperial service by the Europeans. Every European possession had its own, usually substantial, army—Britain's Indian Army was 168,000 strong on the eve of war, while the Royal Netherlands East Indian Army numbered close to 100,000. The rank and file, the NCOs, and even some junior officers were Asian. But the overwhelming majority of the officer corps, and *all* the senior officers, were white.

These local armies were trained and equipped primarily for internal security and not for a major war with a modern Western-style opponent (Britain's Indian Army was, of course, a partial exception to this rule). In some cases, their personnel came from ethnic or religious minorities, like the Christian Amboinese in the Netherlands East Indies, who felt little affinity for the bulk of the population. In some cases, troops were recruited from client kingdoms, like Nepal, whose redoubtable Gurkha infantry played the same role in Britain's Indian Army that those other warlike mountaineers, the Swiss, had played in 16th-century European royal armies. Most of the locally recruited soldiery, however, were simply peasants who enlisted because it was a secure and prestigious job, better rewarded than labor on plantations or in paddy fields—much the same reasons as motivated the European peasants who had enlisted in premodern royal armies, in fact.

Behind local policemen and soldiers stood the stolid all-European units—albeit not many, in relation to the size of either the territories or populations they controlled. They were, however, in possession of the "high tech" weaponry—tanks, armored cars, artillery and aircraft. Again, not much of this sort of weaponry was in fact deployed in imperial territories, and what was there was usually obsolescent by European standards—but an obsolete aircraft can effectively devastate a defenseless village of thatched huts; an archaic tank can be formidable enough to an unarmed crowd.

The real strength of the few European units on station lay, in any case, less in their weaponry than in what they represented—a power long dominant, never yet beaten, and able to conjure up unimaginably punishing force if challenged. Beneath all else lay this fact about the European empires in Asia: Like all other empires before and since, they rested at

The 9th Gurkhas train in the Malayan jungle shortly before the Japanese invasion. Less of a colony than a kingdom with a longstanding working relationship with Britain, Nepal supplied Britain with some of its best soldiers.

bottom on the ability to forcibly coerce obedience, however much they might seek to mask this brute fact by rhetoric about civilizing missions, trusteeship and development. (Of course, some European administrators believed in the reality of all these concepts, acted accordingly, and did much good. They found it very hard to understand that their good intentions were not always recognized or appreciated by those they ruled.)

To this picture of imperial authority firmly in place, it is now necessary to add a number of highlights and shadows. The belief in European martial superiority had received a blow when Japan decisively beat Imperial Russia in 1905. The prolonged European bloodletting of 1914-18 had shaken both the prestige and self-confidence of Europe. Two powerful winds of change, set loose in 1917-19, had blown disturbingly over Asia: Wilsonian concepts of self-determination and the Russian Revolution, with the latter's challenge to the whole bourgeois order of things. Weakened by war and pushed by rising tides of nationalism, the imperial authorities had made concessions, a tendency particularly marked in British India. The French and the Dutch tended, on the other hand, to brand all nationalist demands as "Communist" and put down challenges with a heavy hand. (In the autumn of 1930, the French killed an estimated 10,000 and deported another 50,000 in the course of ending "disturbances" in two of Vietnam's provinces.) All three imperial powers, however, had this in common: None believed their day in Asia was about to end.

The greatest and most formidable of the European imperial structures in Asia was that erected by the British Raj in India. By looking at India more closely, it is possible to get a sense of how the Europeans in Asia saw their situation on the eve of the cataclysm that swept them away.

India had long been the keystone in the British imperial structure. Its economic value was considerable; its strategic value as the provider of a cost-free army to underpin the whole British position "east of Suez" even greater. Possession of India gave the British—or at least those among them who thought about it—a sense of themselves as an imperial people. Traveling across India by train in 1899, young Lieutenant Winston Churchill, using the enforced idleness to write home, told his mother that the completeness of British domination, achieved by a comparative handful of Britons, was the most impressive feature of the Raj.

The architects of that edifice, *the* elite among European imperial administrators, were the officers of the Indian Civil Service (ICS), the "steel framework" of British rule. Recruited from the graduates of Britain's elite "public" (that is, expensive private) schools, the ICS, never numbering more than a few thousand, ran the greatest single European overseas venture. Their belief in themselves as "guardians" of those they ruled, although obviously self-serving, also contained an element of genuine, deeply felt commitment. This was the India that Kipling once celebrated—governed by the ICS, defended by the Indian Army, peopled (at least in British eyes) by loyal and, if in uniform, gallant and devoted peasants. But there was another side as well.

Empire is about control and superiority as well as guardianship. Racism was as much a part of the Raj as the Viceroy's ceremonial processions. Kipling hinted at it; later writers, like E.M. Forster, George Orwell and Paul Scott, would lay bare this seamy side of empire. As the British presence brought about a body of Indian nationalists demanding Indian participation in governing the country, British reluctance to loosen the grip on the levers of power was given an ugly edge by the assumption that Indians were, in any case, incapable of wielding power honestly or effectively. Nonetheless, driven by the pressures of war, the British did make major concessions in 1917-19. More Indians began to join the handful who had

gained entry into the ICS before 1914. Even the "Indianization" of the Indian Army's officer corps was accepted, at least in principle. This involved the sensitive issue of giving Indian officers command and disciplinary authority over white officers and troops. The scheme devised in 1921 would have given the Indian Army an entirely Indian officer corps—in 1967.

As cautious as the changes were, they nevertheless seemed to many Britons much too precipitate, while to Indian nationalists they seemed designed to preserve ultimate British control indefinitely. Nationalist pressures continued to mount. This pressure, and the mechanism built into the 1919 reforms for a review of their working after ten years, set the stage for a second major imperial retreat. The 1935 Government of India Act was not only the longest statute ever passed by Britain's parliament, it was also one of the most bitterly contested pieces of legislation in British political history. Imperialist "die hards," led by Winston Churchill, fought tooth and nail to prevent the bill, with its promise of Indian self-government, from becoming law—they made no secret in the process of their belief that Indians were fundamentally unfit to rule themselves.

It was this piece of legislation, and the emotions its passage aroused, that shaped India's politics on the eve of the war. The 1935 act, likely to founder of its own weight, attempted to accommodate a number of conflicting pressures and ambitions. The Congress Party, led by Jawaharlal Nehru and the charismatic Mohandas Gandhi, claimed to speak for *all* Indian nationalists, a claim vehemently resisted by the Muslim League. The league's dominant figure, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, claimed *only* the league could speak for India's Muslim "minority," which was, in fact, larger than the population of the United Kingdom. Jinnah announced that he had no intention of accepting a "Hindu Raj" in succession to the British.

The Hindu-Muslim antagonism—both a product of Britain's loosening grip and a justification in the eyes of imperialists, like Churchill, for retaining as much British control for as long as possible—was complicated by the existence of some 560 "princely states." These territories, ranging from pocket principalities the size of a golf course to kingdoms as large as Texas, had been a convenient way for the British to control much of India cheaply and indirectly but quite effectively. The princes traditionally had treaties with the British crown that guaranteed their right to reign in return for political subservience. To accommodate all these clashing forces and obligations, the architects of the 1935 act produced a convoluted federal structure that would not even begin to operate until the majority of the princes agreed to join it. Until that moment, ultimate British control remained.

Since the princes feared the advancing Indian nationalists much more than their retreating British overlords, there was no rush on their part to sign up. The result, in 1939, was that a partially self-governing India was still struggling to be born and the viceroy and his officials (nearly all the senior ones still British) continued to control the resources of the Indian subcontinent and the destinies of its inhabitants. What the Indian nationalists clearly could see was that, despite all that had happened since 1917—declarations of good intent, conferences and legislation—British authority in every key area was still untouched. They might be forgiven for deciding that this had been the intention all along.

On September 3, 1939, the Marquess of Linlithgow, Viceroy and Governor General of India, declared India to be automatically at war with Germany as a result of the declaration of war by King George VI, among whose sonorous titles was "Emperor of India." Constitutionally correct, the action was also politically obtuse, enraging Indian nationalist opinion, both Hindu and Muslim. The British Raj still had considerable residual strength, however, as did all the other European imperial regimes. During the next two years that strength would erode, as the reverberations of events in Europe shook the European position in Asia—and as the shadow of Imperial Japan lengthened over it.

The decisive moment came when the Germans overran Western Europe in the spring of 1940. At a stroke, two of the imperial powers, France and the Netherlands, became vassal states in a German empire. The British, who successfully defended themselves, did so at the cost of a ruthless concentration on keeping their home island secure and using whatever could be spared to defend their position in the Mediterranean

Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. The European colonial powers looked hopefully to the growing power of the United States to back them in Asia, but the Americans, too, paid the price for underestimating the Japanese.

and Middle East. The French and Dutch could not reinforce their Asian possessions. The British would not, for fear of compromising their effort to hang on, singlehanded, against Germany. Instead, the British drew heavily on their eastern empire to fuel their war with the European Axis.

The Indian Army became vital to the British war effort in the Middle East—plans were hastily made after the fall of France to expand that army enormously, with that vastly augmented force destined almost entirely for the Middle East. Winston Churchill, whatever he said and wrote later, was very clear at the time: Britain could not fight two major wars at once. Indeed, it was barely holding its own in one. Resources must, therefore, be laid down, be used against Germany.

If, as seemed increasingly likely, Japan moved against the European position in Asia, he was resolved to accept whatever losses befell, confident that any such Japanese move would draw America into the war, making certain an eventual victory and the recovery of those losses. Of course, in the meantime, the cost of any losses would be borne predominantly by Britain's Asian subjects—even though one of the great justifications of empire, according to its defenders, was that it brought protection and security to those subjects.

Hidden within the decision to draw on the Asian empire to sustain the British position in Europe was a time bomb. To expand the Indian Army at a time when Britain itself was committed to total mobilization meant that the needed officers could only be found by accelerating "Indianization" to a speed that would have horrified the architects of the 1921 plan. In 1939, there were few Indian officers in the 168,000-man Indian Army, none of a rank higher than captain. By 1945, the majority of the officers in the 2,500,000-strong force—the largest volunteer army ever raised—were Indians, the most senior of them brigadiers (equivalent to a one-star general in the U.S. Army). An "Indianized" Indian Army was, however, no longer to be reckoned, automatically, a prop of imperial rule. When Churchill became fully aware of this development in mid-1943, he complained volubly and bitterly but, of course, by then it was too late.

To some Asian nationalists, the calamities and distractions that had befallen their European masters presented an opportunity not to be missed. Like Irish nationalists who sought support from Germany in 1914-16, they worked on the principle "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." They found in Japan, if not exactly a friend, a dedicated enemy of the European presence in Asia, and one in a position to provide the muscle they lacked.

The German victories presented the expansionists in Tokyo with tantalizing opportunity. The most radical of the Indian nationalist leaders, Subhas Chandra Bose, had already made his way to Berlin after escaping from British internment, and some Burmese nationalists were in Tokyo. Japanese officers in plain clothes began to reconnoiter the ground over which one day the Imperial Japanese Army might have to fight. Various "Pan Asian" groups both within the Japanese army and from the civilian radical right began to make contacts with nationalist groups. (In May 1940, for example, Japanese Colonel Suzuki Keiji, posing as a newspaper correspondent, arrived in Rangoon, with the assignment of contacting Burmese nationalists who might be willing to sabotage the Burma Road, one of China's last supply lines to the outer world.)

As the Japanese moved steadily south in 1940-41, overtly and covertly, it was clear that the Europeans were unable to react as aggressively as they had to past threats. The French authorities in Indochina, loyal to Vichy, surrendered to Japanese demands for effective control of northern Indochina in July 1940. This enabled the Japanese to close one of the remaining supply links between China and its foreign—and mostly American—supporters.

The British, at death grips with the *Luftwaffe* in the summer of 1940, gave in to Japanese pressure to close the other major supply route to China, the Burma Road, although they limited the closure to a three-month period (when the monsoons would, in any case, have sharply cut traffic). The Dutch, their government-in-exile based in London and locked to British policy, did their best to yield as little and as slowly as possible to Japanese demands for accelerated raw material deliveries. Basically, however, all the Europeans could do was delay—and hope that the Japanese very soon could be deterred by the Americans.

The United States was numbered among the Western imperial powers in Asia by virtue of its control of the sprawling Philippine archipelago. Quickly won from Spain in 1898, American rule had been consolidated over the next two years in one of the more extensive and bloody colonial campaigns of the 19th century. (Kipling's much-quoted and usually misinterpreted phrase about the "white man's burden" occurs in a poem, dedicated to the United States, which he published during the Philippine "insurrection.") Overt colonial rule sat uneasily with American beliefs, however, and in 1936 the United States established a quasi-independent Commonwealth of the Philippines, in which political power would pass into the hands of the landowning class who had provided the local supporters that the Americans, like all the other foreign powers in Asia, needed. Full independence would follow in 10 years.

American naval bases and economic interests were safeguarded, and an American officer, General Douglas MacArthur, would organize the new Commonwealth's armed forces.

There were more points of resemblance between the arrangements creating the Philippine Commonwealth and those that British imperialists sought to write into the 1935 Government of India Act than Americans would have been comfortable with, had they noticed. In 1940-41, the European imperial powers hoped their American cousins, already embroiled with Japan over China, would use their economic and military power to halt the Japanese movement into Tokyo's so-called "Southern Resource Area." Without such American help, the defense of European territories had little to offer except sheer bluff—and some comforting misperceptions about the Japanese.

Infantry and Tank Activities on Malayan Front, *by Usaburo Hara, illustrates the relentless offensive spirit that carried two Japanese divisions to the gates of Singapore against a numerically superior, better-supplied opponent.*

In retrospect, one of the most fascinating aspects of the last months of the European era in Asia is the way in which Westerners both worried about a possible Japanese southward thrust, difficult to counter militarily, while they, at the same moment, comforted themselves with the belief that the Japanese were much overrated and no match for Westerners when it came to serious fighting. The feelings of racial superiority, bred by long unchallenged dominance, made it fatally easy to assume that the Japanese were mere imitators (and inferior ones at that) of the West; that their successes in China merely were the result of facing another group of Asiatics who were hopelessly ill-organized, ineffectively equipped and badly led. The drubbing inflicted in the spring and summer of 1939 by the Russians on Japan's arrogantly aggressive Kwantung army in an undeclared war on the borders of Mongolia and "Manchukuo" can only have reinforced this belief.

Indeed, the Japanese army, its soldiers small in stature by Western standards, its officers dragging archaic, outsized swords, its uniforms perpetually rumpled, did not look particularly menacing. The ferocity they displayed at Nanking was impossible to ignore—nor was it, really—but the fighting power of the Japanese army, the effectiveness of its navy, and the quality of some of its latest-model aircraft were all too easy to miss if one started, as most Westerners did, with a supposition of their own innate superiority.

The casualty rates and their distribution in the Russo-Japanese clash of 1939, however, told an interesting and ominous story: 80 percent of the battalion, company and platoon officers in the Japanese 23rd Division had become casualties. The division itself had lost 12,000 of its 15,000 men. Soviet Maj. Gen. Georgi Zhukhov had used three rifle divisions, five tank brigades and massive artillery support to subdue an enemy who would not desist, no matter how great the odds. It was a forecast of what fighting the Japanese would be like.

Even if the details of this battle were not completely known in London or Washington, the ferocious training program of the Imperial Japanese Army should have been no secret. The unit cohesion and unrelenting aggressiveness that made the Japanese such formidable opponents, despite obsolescent equipment (and lack of parade ground "smartness") would have been readily discernible but for the distortions created by ingrained prejudice.

Instead, obsolescent Western aircraft (like the disastrous Brewster Buffalo with which the Royal Air Force in Malaya was encumbered) were deemed suitable for commitment against the Japanese, whose skills as pilots were consistently denigrated on racial grounds.

At a confidential briefing for senior officers of the 8th Australian Division, which was sent to Malaya in February 1941, the briefing officer, a senior official in British intelligence, calmly assured his listeners that vision difficulties caused by the upward slant of Japanese eyes would prevent their ever flying as well as whites! When Churchill would send a new battleship and an obsolete battle cruiser to Singapore in the autumn of 1941 to "deter" Japan, the Japanese naval aviators sank both with almost contemptuous ease, despite the shape of their eyes!

By the time *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were sunk, the American deterrent had been put out of action at Pearl Harbor; the U.S. Army Air Forces' heavy bombers in the Philippines had been caught on the ground, parked wing-tip to wing-tip at Clarke Field, and crippled; British air power in Malaya almost had been wiped out, too. Singapore was heavily bombed, and the Port of Rangoon, starting point for China-bound supplies on the Burma Road, was soon devastated. And this was only the beginning of a cataract of disasters. A Japanese force of two divisions, outnumbered by the defenders and at the end nearly out of ammunition, swept down the Malay peninsula and took Singapore in 70 days (even Japanese planners thought they would need a hundred).

"Black Sunday," February 15, 1942: Lieutenant General A.E. Percival surrenders the "impregnable" citadel of the empire, Singapore. Britain would retake the city, but the consequences of its loss would persist long after the war's end.

When the Japanese landed on Java and the Dutch were urged by their allies to resort to guerrilla war, Dutch officers admitted they lacked the popular support necessary to wage it and capitulated. The Japanese swept through Burma as they had Malaya. Few Burmans, it is true, actively aided them. Even fewer, though, rallied to their British rulers.

The reverberations of these defeats were immense in India—in the summer of 1942 Gandhi's "Quit India" movement sparked the most widespread revolt against British rule since 1857. Even Churchill was constrained to promise self-government at war's end in order to secure continued Indian cooperation. Without setting foot in India, the Imperial Japanese Army had precipitated a revolution. The Indian Army would, indeed, fight gallantly, brilliantly and devotedly until 1945, but everyone knew the Raj had run its course.

Nor did the Americans escape the debacle. The successful focus on the defense of Bataan and Corregidor, aided by Hollywood's usual massaging of inconvenient history, has largely obscured the fact that the Japanese took their objectives in the Philippines as readily as they did in Malaya or Burma. Their inability to use Manila Bay, caused by Corregidor's gallant stand, inconvenienced the Japanese so little that they took a division from the attacking force there to reinforce their assault on more important objectives in the Dutch East Indies.

In six incredible months, the Japanese had overrun all the European and American possessions in Southeast Asia and were poised on the borders of India as well as within striking distance of Australia. It was a triumph of good staff work, aggressive execution and logistical virtuosity. It was also the inevitable nemesis that, in classical drama, follows so swiftly on overweening pride.

Looking back with the advantage of 50 years, it is easy to see that Western dominance in Asia could not have survived much longer even without the war. Too many pressures were being brought to bear against it. What the events of December 1941 and the following months did was to strip from the Westerners the last vestiges of the accumulated prestige and reputation for invincibility in arms—intangibles that had long been one of the most important assets of white rulers in Asia. Those rulers had been unable to protect their subjects, save their local collaborators, or even ward off personal humiliation (something the Japanese took pains to inflict in abundance). The imperialists' claims to obedience and pretensions to superiority were alike shattered.

The Japanese, succumbing themselves to *hubris* and proving masters as ruthless as any Western power, of course were defeated in their turn—in short order, even—but there was no restoring the old European imperial order. The former "subjects" would never again see the Western powers in quite the same way. The British, recognizing this, got out as swiftly and gracefully as they could. The Dutch tried to hold on, an exercise that was costly, fruitless . . . but mercifully brief. The French, bitterly trying to erase overseas the doubts about their great power status raised in 1940, would fight a desperate rearguard action (made possible largely by American financial support) that ended in 1954 in a military debacle analogous to that of 1941-42 when, at Dien Bien Phu, another army of Asian peasants again demonstrated that military professionalism was not limited to Westerners.

South and Southeast Asia, 50 years ago, like France in 1788 or Russia in 1916, was a political order headed for catastrophe. Out of the thunderous collapse of empire there came a chain of events that ended only when the last helicopter lifted off the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon in 1975—reason enough, perhaps, for us to reflect on it now. □

Raymond Callahan is director of the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program at the University of Delaware. For further reading, he recommends the relevant chapters of Peter Calvocoressi's Total War *(2nd ed.) and J.G. Farrell's illuminating historical novel* The Singapore Grip.

Island Of Destiny

Saipan was tough and cruel, and by comparison, nearby Tinian was easy. Then came the Seabees. . .then the *Enola Gay*. And finally war's end!

By George A. Larson

The equation for American military planners hoping to pound Japan into submission by strategic bombing was simple. The B-29s based at new, coolie-built air fields in China could reach the Home Islands, true. But reaching the new B-29 bases themselves with basic supplies, such as aviation fuel for the engines, meant the uncertain promise of that long thin aerial pipeline over the Hump from India—the Himalayas.

How much more simple and efficient to seize islands in the Pacific within range of Japan! And supply them in absolute security—in quantity, even—by sea!

The Pacific campaign in any case must leapfrog from point to point, ever closer to Japan proper, with Japan herself as the ultimate goal. The equation thus pointed to the volcanic island group known as the Marianas—chiefly, that would be Saipan, Guam and far-less-known Tinian, with Tinian the one of the three destined to go down in history as the jump-off point for the double blow that ultimately ended the war.

The war in the Pacific already had seen the vast and costly efforts expended upon Guadalcanal, New Guinea and Tarawa—the great battles of the Philippines, Iwo Jima and Okinawa were yet to come—but this gathering of forces for the Marianas campaign in early summer of 1944 was for the greatest American effort yet. This amphibious operation in the Central Pacific would commit 535 ships and 125,000 combat troops, both Army and Marine Corps, with Marine generals in charge of the ground forces.

Logistically, the proposed Operation Forager would be a nightmare because of the long distances from American support and supply ports. The leap to the Marianas represented an advance of some 1,300 miles from the recently seized Gilbert and Marshall islands, but it would place the B-29 Superfortresses only 1,200 miles from Japan.

Further, the seizure of Tinian Island—planned as a follow-on to the conquest of Saipan—would not be a conventional ship-to-shore operation like those practiced throughout the Pacific Theater until now, but rather would be a shore-to-shore affair staged from Saipan, only 3½ miles away. Indeed, a primary reason for tackling Saipan first was to establish a land-support base to assist the forces earmarked for the invasion of Tinian, which offered flat and level ground easily converted into the long air strips needed by the giant B-29s. Saipan's southern coastline would provide excellent artillery-support positions for the pre-invasion and defense-suppression gunfire the Marines would need before taking their own 75mm pack artillery ashore on Tinian.

Aerial reconnaissance of Tinian showed that the southern beaches near Tinian Town were heavily defended, with the bulk of Japanese forces positioned around them. Two smaller beaches at the northwest end of the island were only lightly defended—identified as White 1 and 2. These were narrow and blocked by six-foot sea cliffs.

The Boeing B-29—capable of bombing Japan from bases in China; yet, those bases themselves were hard to keep supplied. In June 1944, the Americans sought a better alternative by advancing 1,300 miles across the Pacific to secure new air bases on the Marianas islands of Saipan and Tinian.

Enter the U.S. Navy's Seabees, who would make a significant contribution to the invasion's success, enabling the Marines and their equipment to quickly scale the cliffs. The Seabees modified a Landing Vehicle Tank (LVT) to carry an articulated mat of six-foot-wide wooden timbers, supported by two side-mounted, 10-inch steel I-beams. The LVT operators hit the beach, drove up to the base of the sea cliff, secured the I-beams at the cliff's top, and as the machine backed away, the wooden mat unrolled down the beams, providing a ready ramp. Tracked landing vehicles could then come ashore from the Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs), climb the ramp and head inland with a minimum delay.

Since the beaches were so narrow, the off-loading capacity had to be stressed. Then, once the landing area was secured, Seabees with bulldozers would push sand and coral over the ramps to form a more stable and larger ramp off the beach.

First, however, a tremendous argument developed between Vice Adm. Richmond Kelly Turner, the amphibious commander, and Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Holland M. Smith, the ground commander, over the selection of invasion beaches. Smith favored the White beaches, while Turner wanted to land on the Tinian Town beaches. At one point Admiral Turner shouted: "You are not going to land on White beaches, I won't land you there!" But General Smith shouted back: "Oh yes you will! You'll land any g—d— place I tell you to!" Eventually, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, commander of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, pulled all parties together—an agreement was reached on using the White beaches.

The invasion planners did include a diversionary amphibious landing operation against Tinian Town's beaches on the morning of the invasion to freeze Japanese forces there, while the actual invasion force struck the White beaches. Saipan-based artillery was to disrupt Japanese interior lines of communication and selectively neutralize the White beaches defenses.

On June 11, 1944, U.S. naval carrier aircraft struck Tinian for the first time, while other carrier forces neutralized Japanese air bases on Truk and the Carolines, clearing the path

TOP: The invasion of Tinian began with a feint at Tinian Town, where the Japanese defenses were concentrated, followed by the actual landing at the northern beaches. MIDDLE: On June 11, 1944, carrier aircraft, such as these aboard the light carrier Cowpens, *bombed Tinian's defenses and destroyed all Japanese aircraft on the island. ABOVE: Demolition teams prepare the beachhead. The Seabees also improvised articulated wooden mats to negotiate the six-foot sea cliffs of White Beaches 1 and 2.*

for direct ship-to-shore bombardment of Tinian targets. Ensuing air strikes destroyed all Japanese aircraft remaining on the island.

Also prior to invasion day, U.S. warships fired more than 11,000 shells into Tinian, while aircraft dropped more than five hundred 500-pound bombs, as well as numerous rockets and incendiaries. The heaviest shelling, however, came from 156 Saipan-based artillery guns firing 25,000 shells at Tinian at a rate of one per minute.

Invasion day was planned for July 24, 1944. At 0730 hours, the diversionary landing aimed at Tinian Town's beaches began with landing craft lowered from assault ships and headed toward the beach. The landing craft drew heavy gunfire from Japanese shore batteries but no hits to speak of. As the Japanese watched, the American landing craft then withdrew—it appeared the shore batteries had driven off the attempted landing.

Even then, however, as the diversionary landing craft withdrew, Navy ships farther north began an intense shelling of the intended White beaches. The new bombardment was joined by the artillery on nearby Saipan, and all this firepower held the Japanese in their positions. At 0750 hours, the U.S. 4th Marine Division landed on the dangerously narrow White beaches, fighting through light Japanese opposition. By nightfall, the 15,000 invading Marines had secured a beachhead approximately one mile in depth before they dug in for the night in anticipation of a Japanese counterattack.

Early on July 25, the Japanese attacked but were unable to dislodge the American Marines and sailors around the beach. In daylight, 1,200 dead Japanese were counted around the Marines' defensive line. As the Americans already had learned on Saipan, "Victory or Death!" was no empty slogan for the individual Japanese soldier—if the Japanese soldier, airman or sailor permitted himself to be captured, this was a great disgrace to his country, family and himself. On Saipan, even Japanese civilians had dashed themselves to pieces on the rocks below the seaside cliffs rather than surrender to the American invaders.

Later on the 25th, the 2nd Marine Division landed to support the drive south, coming ashore at a peaceful and leisurely pace since the sporadic Japanese opposition was farther south.

Navy warships continued to provide timely and highly accurate fire support on Japanese concentrations as the Marines advanced toward the southern end of the island. On July 30, U.S. Marines reached their main target in the south, Tinian Town, while still facing only scattered Japanese opposition. The drive to capture Tinian Town was easier than first anticipated because the majority of Japanese defensive gun emplacements faced south and could not be turned to meet the southward-advancing Marines. (The island's Sunharron Roads Harbor, however, was heavily mined and would not be available for use as a resupply port for some time.)

The Marines, with few casualties, now controlled nearly four-fifths of the island. They counted approximately 4,000 Japanese troops killed and were forcing the remaining 9,000 soldiers and civilians into a small mountainous area at the southeast tip of the island.

In their drive south, U.S. Marines fired 190,000 artillery shells, with thousands of rounds and bombs added by Navy warships and aircraft. While such concentrated firepower forced the Japanese to seek cover in caves in the hills, those same southern mountains required the advancing Marines to attack uphill. They often had to manhandle their 75mm artillery up the cliffs to blast out Japanese pockets of resistance. By July 31, however, the Marines had pushed their lines so close to the Japanese hiding positions that now many Japanese and Korean civilians began surrendering—waving white flags as they slowly edged down the hills toward the Marine positions.

The establishment of a solid beachhead against light, unprepared opposition made the vital difference in the relative ease and low casualties involved in the American seizure of Tinian. Here, Marines bring up fresh mortar rounds and ammunition.

But late on the evening of July 31, the Japanese soldiers came down the hills in a desperate banzai attack against the Marine positions, and soon the fighting turned into hand-to-hand combat. The Marines blunted, then stopped the first attack, but the Japanese were not yet finished. Early the following morning, they launched another banzai attack. This time, they ran smack into concentrated machine-gun and 75mm artillery fire.

With those final, desperate Japanese assaults done, the remaining enemy soldiers and civilians withdrew into deep caves that were difficult to locate and dangerous to attack. The Marine strategy was then to locate isolated groups in the caves, one after the other, so that they were systematically "mopped up." Even so, Japanese survivors hiding in the southeastern caves would harass American forces on Tinian for months.

As on Saipan before, many Japanese soldiers and civilians jumped from the high southern cliffs to their deaths on the rocks and in the water in mass suicides. It was a sad postscript to the conquest of Tinian that mop-up operations continued until January 1, 1945, with 5,000 Japanese killed in connection with the invasion, but an additional 4,000 committing suicide rather than surrendering. The U.S. Marines, for their part, suffered 389 killed and 1,886 wounded in securing Tinian for its next wartime role—its development by U.S. Navy Seabees into the giant B-29 airfield complexes to be known as West and North Fields.

Tinian's 48 square miles of flat to gently rolling countryside provided the Americans with potentially the best area for a major Central Pacific air base. With virtual subjugation of the occupying Japanese, the island was ready for the Seabees to complete their "miracle of construction" that would turn the entire island into the world's largest airfield complex.

Many different Seabee battalions worked on the island once the Marines secured it. The 110th USNCB landed first on Saipan, and then moved on to Tinian on September 9. The 135th landed on Tinian on October 24 and went to work on West Field before being transferred to North Field as lead construction battalion on that project. The 38th USNCB landed in two separate echelons, the first on December 29, and the second on January 6, 1945. Various other Seabee elements worked on Tinian in, what was, overall, a monumental construction effort.

Since the island resembled Manhattan Island, all roads on Tinian were given New York street names such as Fifth Avenue, Broadway (the main north-south island roadway) and many others. As more and more Seabees arrived on the island, their work drastically altered the island to accommodate the B-29 squadrons that were to fly against Japan. The island was turned into a showcase of Seabee ingenuity.

The Seabees initially worked on Tinian's northernmost airstrip, the Japanese Ushi Point airfield, by putting down an all-weather, steel, interlocking mat runway over the existing coral surface. During the invasion, American C-47s flew from the cleared coral airstrip, taking out the wounded and bringing in food for the Marines after the invasion beach's floating supply causeway was destroyed during a typhoon. Once the Seabees upgraded the airstrip, P-51 Mustangs landed from Saipan to provide protection against Japanese fighters and bombers on one-way missions from Iwo Jima to the north.

Next came West Field, a complex of two 8,500-by-200-foot parallel runways—it was a rush project given an initial construction deadline of 45 days to allow the first Navy B-24 flight-patrol operations. The construction work involved removing more than three million cubic yards of earth and coral, plus hauling one million cubic yards of coral-surfacing material. The work required 230 trucks, 20 power shovels, 66 tractors, and numerous earth scrapers, bulldozers and rollers—and 88,312 man-days of work. The Seabees continued to work on West Field even as work began on the larger, four-runway North Field complex.

The Seabees used wagon drills to bore through the coral to a depth of 18 feet, in a pattern of two feet apart over an

area of approximately one acre. Then, the holes were filled with 24 to 36 sticks of dynamite each, depending on how much coral was to be blasted. After the shattering explosion, dump trucks and power shovels quickly moved in to haul the coral to dump sites at West Field. The dumped coral was graded and rolled with large spiked rollers to pulverize and compact the surface. Large rollers further compacted the coral surface—salt water, sprayed on the coral, created an end product almost as hard as cement.

Eventually, a blacktop surface was added to the runways, but B-29s originally used the coral-surfaced taxiways and runways. The Seabees built and operated a complete asphalt plant to provide the volume of surfacing material needed on the island—55-gallon drums of asphalt were delivered by ship, trucked to the plant and, when needed, rolled down steel rails into a large vat where steam melted the asphalt. Finely crushed and dried coral was then added to the mixture prior to its use. Once surfacing work started, it went on in a continuous cycle, even with B-29s operating nearby. The Seabees used 500,000 tons of asphalt throughout the island's construction projects.

As big as West Field was, North Field, on the northern tip of the island, was larger. Historically it would be the most important, for this was the airfield that launched America's two atomic bomb strikes against Japan in August 1945. To develop North Field, Seabees cut down sugar cane fields, bulldozed Japanese oil dumps, ammunition bunkers, revetments and defensive bunkers to clear the area for their initial construction work. The runways were to be 8,500 feet long with taxiway grades not exceeding 1.5 percent, enabling heavily loaded B-29s to move from hardstands to takeoff positions under their own power. Soil tests indicated a final 45-percent compacted coral composite surface of 6 to 18 inches would support heavily loaded B-29s.

Survey teams continuously monitored construction work in order to maintain proper grade and surface dimensions—low spots sometimes filled to a height of 15 to 20 feet. Seabees working on the four airstrips constantly watched signals from officers directing the construction process, especially when blasting operations were being readied. A mistake or lapse in judgment could place a careless Seabee into the middle of a planned explosion or against the flow of traffic on a runway.

The Seabees used nearly all conceivable construction equipment while working on North Field. They drove 570 dump trucks, 200 cargo trucks, 173 earth scrapers, 160 tractors and bulldozers, 60 graders and other equipment. The mere maintenance of this huge motor fleet was itself a challenge.

The pace of construction work never slowed, and at times it increased to meet crucial deadlines or to complete special projects. The Seabees started work on West Field on October 1, and then picked up their responsibility for North Field on October 24 as additional Seabee battalions landed on Tinian.

North Field's runway No. 1 was completed on December 21, with the first B-29 landing on the 22nd. Runway No. 4, though, would be the most famous, since it was from here that the *Enola Gay* and the other aircraft of the 509th Composite Group flew the first atomic bomb to the skies over Hiroshima, followed by the mission to Nagasaki three days later (August 6 and 9, 1945).

While developing the two fields, too, the Seabees used 80 power shovels, one dozen 12-ton rooters to tear out boulders and trees, 48 rollers, 90 drills, 40 water wagons to spread salt water on the coral surfaces, 70 portable welding units and countless other pieces of equipment to prepare the B-29 runways and pave the way for the two atomic bomb missions.

The Seabees worked 10-hour shifts, with a two-hour shift interval to service equipment, feed crews and transport personnel to and from the various work sites.

American troops take cover under sniper fire. As on Saipan and Guam, the Japanese on Tinian wasted their manpower and defensive capabilities in a succession of suicidal "Banzai" charges.

Meanwhile, even with all the leveling of high spots on the runways, there was not enough fill material to level all the depressions—as a result, huge coral pits were dug throughout the island to provide the necessary fill and topping material for the runways, taxiways and various construction projects.

To bring the North and West Fields to their full wartime potential, the Seabees constructed a 14,000-barrel diesel oil, a 2,000-barrel gasoline and a 165,000-barrel aviation fuel storage complex. These were served by an off-shore, single-tanker mooring point feeding into 86,000 feet of fuel distribution pipelines. The Seabees also turned 1,700 acres of sugar cane fields into various camp sites, with an additional 300 acres

allocated for supply dumps. They built 70 miles of coral and 50 miles of main-haul asphalt roads to handle heavily loaded trucks traveling from the southern docks to construction sites and, later, to support B-29 operations.

They were able to work at night by using portable generators to provide light for the work areas. These were quickly shut off at the sound of any approaching Japanese aircraft—at that point, men headed for slit trenches, diving in and keeping their heads down until the all-clear sounded.

Seabees soon improved Sunharron Roads Harbor by building an artificial breakwater enclosing a double U-shaped pier complex that could handle eight Liberty Class cargo ships at a time. The breakwater was built on an existing coral reef that circled the existing harbor; the breakwater was built of 120 circular cells of sheet piling, 30 feet in diameter, filled with coral.

A Seabee unit based on newly recaptured Guam conducted salvage operations to remove wreckage and dredge the harbor to the proper depth. All this activity provided a 32-foot-deep ocean-access channel into the harbor, as well as 28-foot berthing slips. Cargos could now be unloaded onto the docks, decreasing off-loading time and increasing port volume. Even so, General Curtis LeMay's B-29s subsequently would stretch the cargo capacity of the docks to the maxi-

TOP: Empty shells litter the deck of a Cleveland *class light cruiser during the shelling of Tinian. The naval bombardment was complemented by artillery fire from nearby Saipan Island. MIDDLE: The transformation of Tinian to an air base displayed the talents of the Seabees at the peak of their form. Here, a coral pit provides fill material for runways and taxiways. ABOVE: B-29 Enola Gay of the 509th Composite Group following her return to Tinian after dropping her atomic bomb on Hiroshima.*

mum—his large-scale fire-bomb raids on Japan consumed huge volumes of incendiary bombs.

Even with all the careful planning and construction work, mistakes were made on the airfield complexes. The long return haul to Tinian from Japan (prior to the capture of Iwo Jima, much closer to Japan) and the construction of an emergency landing strip were dangerous operations when low fuel, battle damage or wounded crew members were factors. The western ends of North Field were high, with an exposed coral incline running out of the ocean. Many returning B-29 pilots could not always determine the actual beginning of a runway and, either through mission fatigue or battle damage, would approach too low, crashing into the bank prior to the runway. This error was quickly corrected by covering the exposed coral with black waste oil or asphalt.

The Seabees also were assigned special projects not originally planned or foreseen for North Field. A selected group worked on a one-of-a-kind building scheduled to serve as the final assembly and checkout site for the atomic bombs. It was a large structure, with a thick poured-concrete floor reinforced with steel mesh and copper wire to act as a grounding source. Steel shavings were added to the concrete to increase hardening and conductivity under an almost continuous wet-down cycle to provide a slow-drying, extremely hard floor. Once the building was completed, though, it was never used for the actual assembly and storage of the A-bombs. They were assembled in another complex in the 509th Composite Group's area, located off the northwest end of North Field. A series of B-29 hardstands and two isolated Y-shaped bomb-pit loading areas were constructed for the 509th, plus additional buildings and support facilities. The Seabees were told not to ask any questions—just do their work and then leave.

The results of all the hard work and occasional ingenuity came early on August 6, 1945. A floodlight illuminated the *Enola Gay* as it stood ready for the world's first atomic bomb mission. Colonel Paul Tibbets started the engines at 2:27 a.m., and then moved to final taxi position at 2:35. At 2:45, he began the *Enola Gay*'s takeoff roll, keeping the B-29 on the ground until just before the end of the runway, building up as much speed as possible for his aircraft's takeoff rotation.

"The Miracle of Construction" that the historic aircraft temporarily left behind on Tinian had evolved into an immense project: six 8,500-foot hard-surface runways; 29 miles of connecting taxiways; hundreds of hardstands; two smaller fighter airstrips and 1,000 buildings; more miles of roads; fuel and ammunition storage facilities; plus all the required support and utility services. The Seabee construction battalions had moved approximately 11,000,000 cubic yards of earth and coral for the island's construction projects. After the Marines did their job, Tinian was jammed with 12,000 Seabees, 13,000 Navy and 21,500 Army personnel...all on an island with its own Broadway and Fifth Avenue, an island long since forgotten, but arguably THE island which ended World War II. □

USAF Lt. Col. George A. Larson explains the extent of his interest in Tinian: "My expertise is based on a visit to Tinian in January 1981 while stationed on the island of Guam with the 43rd Strategic Bomb Wing, Andersen Air Force Base. I have also talked to more than 100 former 135th U.S. Naval Construction Battalion (Seabee) members, plus those in other Seabee units. In April 1987, I organized the first post-World War II reunion of the 135th in Mobile, Ala., while collecting information on my book, Road to Tinian *(Taylor Publishing Company). I am also a biographic contributor to the recently published* Seabee History Book *(Taylor Publishing). I also interviewed and corresponded with B-29 pilots and crews, as well as with members of the 504th and 509th Bombardment Groups (VH).*

THE DEFENSE OF RORKE'S DRIFT

By Alphonse de Neuville

On January 22, 1879, the British Empire was shaken to its foundations by the annihilation of a force of 1,700 men at the hands of the Zulus at Isandhlwana, southern Africa. That same evening, 4,500 fresh Zulu warriors of General Dabulamanzi's Undi Corps advanced on the small mission station at Rorke's Drift.

Over the next 10 hours, a little more than 200 British troops under the joint command of Lieutenants J.R.M. Chard and Gonville Bromhead withstood the odds with an improvised defense that restored honor to the British army and earned no less than eleven Victoria Crosses. Even the Zulus, withdrawn at the order of King Cetshwayo, are reported to have saluted the valor of their adversaries before they departed.

Fittingly, this remarkable victory was recorded by one of history's greatest military artists, Alphonse de Neuville (1835-1885). Combining the "romantic realism" of his time and a special sympathy for the common soldier, de Neuville's *The Defense of Rorke's Drift* stands as one of the greatest military paintings of all time.

Neuville's scene is set at a little after 7:00 p.m., when Bromhead (center, directing the defense) had fallen back to an inner redoubt made of biscuit boxes and mealie bags. Within this 170-yard perimeter, the hospital, torched minutes earlier, is being evacuated, while Surgeon-Major J.H. Reynolds continues to tend the wounded in the foreground and Chaplain George Smith relays fresh ammunition to the soldiers manning the barricade including Lt. Chard on the far right.

Now, the fierce, dramatic moment depicted by Neuville is being published in association with the Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney, Australia), where the original oil painting is exhibited. Every effort has been made to insure that the print is an exact and faithful reproduction of the original, just as it looked when unveiled at the Fine Art Society of London in March 1880.

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Only those who were there can really recall life under Hitler—at home or at the front.

By Richard P. Montpelier

A prosecutor we once knew often remarked that his best case was a good circumstantial case. . . but such an assertion, of course, is a falsehood. What could be stronger, say, than bursting in upon the perpetrator while he stands, smoking pistol in hand, over the still-warm body in a locked, windowless room?

On a far different level, of course, we all know what the prosecutor friend really means, for here is a man, quite obviously, who loves his work. He means: what could be finer than to be intellectually and emotionally engaged in a case in which each link is interconnected to the next, until finally they all, together, compose an impeccable chain of circumstance? That, in essence, is what they write all those detective stories about.

The analogy here is the anecdotal, the *circumstantial*, nature of oral history, wherein one pithy recollection added to another can give the average reader, the buff or the serious scholar, a vital ingredient of the past that even the best-studied or best-written history book cannot—impression.

We saw it in Studs Terkel's "*The Good War*" (his quotes around the title, by the way) in 1984 (Pantheon Books, New York), and now the same format is back in a Germanized version, *Voices From the Third Reich* (Regnery Gateway, Washington, DC., 1989, $24.95), with Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel and Dennis Showalter listed as editors, compilers and interpreters.

Simply stated, it is one thing to read *about* the trials and tribulations that visited soldier and civilian alike in a Nazi Germany that was defeated in World War II. It is quite another thing to hear it directly from them, unfiltered by the earnest (or biased) historian's overview.

Behind the Nazi war machine: workers at the Messerschmitt plant. Like the soldiers, the officials and the death camp victims, these "ordinary people" had a story to tell of life in the Reich.

Hear it, in fact, is an operative phrase, since oral history that is carefully and succinctly edited—like *Voices*, it so happens—offers the reader a sense of hearing as well as reading.

"After the amputation of my left arm. . ." begins one of the 150 "voices" quoted as oral history in the book. "I have several very strong memories from the war. . ." starts off another. A bit more prosaic, one may think, until it is noticed that the "voice" in this case is West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

The book springs, in fact, from a number of exalted sources, names familiar to any student of postwar Germany and the war itself. Rommel's son Manfred, for instance, is in it. Former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt wrote the preface; even a Bismarck descendant appears among the 150 voices.

In addition, one of the three editors, Johannes Steinhoff, is a former *Luftwaffe* fighter ace who, in later peacetime life, became chief of staff to postwar Germany's air force. Peter Pechel is a German journalist. Dennis Showalter, a history professor at Colorado College, provides the incisive historical narrative needed as context for the brief interviews.

The interviews, it should be made clear, also come from the "little people," the common soldier, the average civilian, even the hounded Jew, who experienced the war. The "story line" runs the gamut, too—from prewar politics, to the early military triumphs, to the evils of the Holocaust and the concentration camps; the growing list of defeats on all fronts; the final collapse; and even the grim experience of German POWs held in the Soviet Union.

The epilogue speaks fairly enough when it says the book (at 550 pages) is comprehensive. "Concentration camp victims and SS men, resistance activists and teenage Nazis, emigrés and true believers stand side by side in its pages. . . .They have spoken for themselves, without interjection or comment by the authors. They have in common only an identity in place and time: They were Germans between 1933 and 1945. And in 1945 they saw the end of their world."

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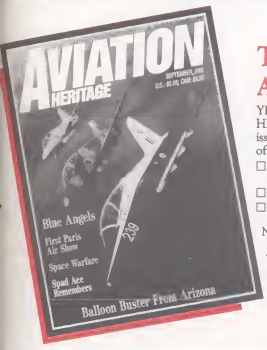

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Only those who were there can really recall life under Hitler—at home or at the front.

By Richard P. Montpelier

A prosecutor we once knew often remarked that his best case was a good circumstantial case . . . but such an assertion, of course, is a falsehood. What could be stronger, say, than bursting in upon the perpetrator while he stands, smoking pistol in hand, over the still-warm body in a locked, windowless room?

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A reviewer could not say it better, except to add that they tell their story with compelling *voice* at that.

Massacre at Ouradour, *by Robin Mackness, New York, N.Y., Random House,* 1989, $17.95

On June 10, 1944, four days after the Allied landings in Normandy, 642 men, women and children were slaughtered by troops of the 2nd SS Panzer Division *Das Reich* in the remote French village of Ouradour-sur-Glane. While harsh German reprisals for ambushes and acts of sabotage committed by the Resistance were all too common, Ouradour was different. Most German "punishments" were conducted openly, with full official trappings. Yet Ouradour, an isolated farm village that had never exhibited any evidence of Resistance activity and had rarely even seen a German, had been sealed off and wiped out—after which, the deed was covered up. Why?

The scene now shifts to 1982. Robin Mackness, a British-born Swiss citizen and a member of the board of directors of a Swiss bank, was arrested by French customs officials near Lyon, 50 miles from the nearest French border. He was carrying 50 kilograms of gold bullion at the time—not illegal in itself but, because he refused to reveal the name of his client and his employers, he was sent to prison (had he revealed their names, however, he would have been liable to prosecution under Swiss law).

Aside from costing Mackness 21 months in a French prison, that incident inadvertantly brought him into contact with the only man left alive who knew the awful secret of Ouradour—who revealed the one missing piece that made horrible sense out of the 38-year-old mystery. *Massacre at Ouradour* is Mackness' account of how he stumbled upon that chilling solution.

It began with an ambush on a convoy of three German trucks en route to Ouradour on June 9, 1944. The trucks contained half a ton of gold that had been privately acquired by three German officers, and their disappearance led to a search of the town and the slaughter of its inhabitants, dutifully carried out by SS troops under the orders of officers who wanted their act kept secret from the world—including their own Third Reich.

For 40 years, only two men knew the venal truth behind it: the commander of the 2nd SS Panzer Division and an old *Maquisard.* Both had good—though different—reasons for keeping quiet.

Massacre at Ouradour is a riveting detective story that, like a good work of fiction, contains some intriguing twists. What makes it most interesting, however, is the fact that it is not fiction.

Robert Guttman

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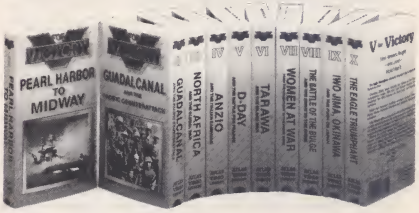

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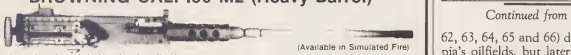

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Armament

Continued from page 16

62, 63, 64, 65 and 66) defending Romania's oilfields, but later that year, four squadrons (*Escadrile* 11, 12, 13 and 14) were committed to *Corpul I Aerian*, which was itself a component of the German *Luftwaffe*'s I Fliegerkorps in the Ukraine. Operating mainly over the Zaporozhye sector, the IARs served mainly in close-support, fighter-bomber and tactical reconnaissance roles.

During 1942, in the interests of rendering the overall Axis effort in Russia more effective through standardized war production, the Romanian government ordered IAR, which was then producing IAR-81Cs, to phase them out in favor of the Messerschmitt Bf-109G. In January 1943, the 167th and last IAR-81C left the Brasov plant. On April 16, 1944, IAR had only assembled 30 Bf-109G-6s and built 16 others before a bombing raid by the 15th Air Force brought production to a halt. On May 6, a return visit from the Americans almost completely gutted the once-sizeable Brasov factory.

The IAR fighters had already engaged American aircraft in anger. In the summer of 1943, following the mauling that the Romanian First and Fourth Armies had taken during the fighting around Stalingrad, the four Russian-based *escadrile* were withdrawn and reassigned to home defense. During Operation Tidal Wave on August 1, 1943, the units in and around the Ploesti oilfields were scrambled up against attacking B-24s of the 15th Air Force and claimed a number of the 54 B-24s downed out of a total of 163 committed to the raid.

The American records of a special high-speed fighter-bomber raid against Ploesti on June 10, 1944, yielded a vivid example of what the IAR-80 could do when flown by competent pilots. Bomb-laden P-38 Lightnings of the 15th Air Force's 82nd Fighter Group caused incidental damage to the refinery, but lost nine of their number to flak and German fighters. The 82nd claimed seven of the enemy in turn.

Higher up, P-38s of the 1st Fighter Group's 71st Squadron were flying top cover for the 82nd when they were jumped by a group of IAR-80s. All of the P-38s turned away from the Romanians save one, whose pilot, Lieutenant Herbert Hatch, hesitated and then turned into the oncoming IARs. Firing short but devastating bursts of concentrated fire from his five nose guns, Hatch shot down five of the IARs, broke free of the trap and returned home.

Hatch was the only 71st pilot to do so. Virtually ignoring him, the Romanians had kept after the other P-38s and

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shot down all 14 of them. Hatch was credited with five "Focke-Wulf Fw-190s," a common error attributable to similarities in frontal silhouette between the German and Romanian fighters.

On August 20, 1944, the Soviets invaded Romania. Shortly afterward, Ion Antonescu's fascist government was overthrown on August 23, and the new regime declared war on Germany the next day. On September 21, IAR-80s and 81s, their yellow Axis recognition markings painted over and their crosses replaced by cockades, commenced hostilities against their former German allies.

On September 23, two IAR-80s of *Escadrile* 65, flown by *Adjutant Sef* Vasile Mirilă and *Adjutant* Alexandru Bouru, were flying air support for Soviet and Romanian ground troops at Turda, Transylvania, when they were jumped by six German Messerschmitt Bf-109Gs. A second IAR element, led by *Adjutant* Androne Stavar, joined the unequal melée and downed one of the Messerschmitts in flames but, at the same time, two other Bf-109s got on Bouru's tail and sent him, too, down in flames. That dogfight set the tone for numerous fierce aerial encounters between the former allies in the months to come.

The IAR-80 fighters and their veteran pilots accounted for many of the 101 Germans lost to Romanian aircraft and antiaircraft fire in the course of those final campaigns but, by the end of the war, only four IAR-equipped units—*Escadrile* 61, 62, 65 and 66—remained operational.

IAR-80s and 81s continued to serve alongside some surviving Bf-109Gs as the main Romanian fighters until 1949-50, when they were finally phased out by Soviet-built Lavochkin La-7s and Yakovlev Yak-9s. In 1950, the *Atelierele de reperatii material volant* (ARMV) at Pepira gave Romania's home-built fighter a last reprieve from oblivion by inserting an open cockpit ahead of the regular cockpit. In this dual-control form, the IAR-80DC, as it was called, soldiered on as a fighter trainer up to the end of 1952.

A thoroughly competent warplane, the IAR-80 set an historical precedent in aviation. Not only did it establish a place in Romania's long—if sporadic—tradition of outstanding aviation design but it was one of the first aircraft to combine designs from three countries, at a time when the major powers were too fiercely competitive to consider such a resort.

Fifty years since the IAR-80 first flew, multinational collaboration is commonplace in the aviation field. Romania should know. She is again producing her own fighter-bomber, the IAR-93 (also built in Yugoslavia as the SOKO *Orao*, or Eagle), which combines a British jet engine with Romanian and Yugoslavian aerodynamic and structural design. □

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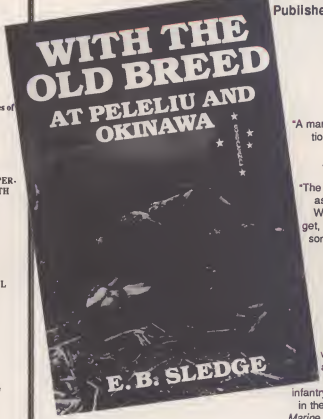

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Personality

Continued from page 10

zio. The future dictator aped the poet's style, bombastic to modern ears but capable at the time of stirring the Italian soul. Although D'Annunzio supported Mussolini, *Il Duce* grew increasingly jealous, for the poet was also an aviator, a skill that the dictator aspired to but never fully mastered. Consequently, D'Annunzio's death in 1938 inspired no sense of loss. According to Ciano, who was Mussolini's son-in-law, the Fascist leader shed not a tear when the patriotic voice had been stilled forever. As he toured the poet's estate on Lake Garda, in fact, Mussolini was busily scheming how the trophies of war kept there, including a small ship and several cannons, could be confiscated and melted down to make new weapons.

Among those who helped Mussolini and the Fascists seize power in 1922 was Cesare Rossi, who assumed responsibility for removing any threat to the new regime. The sound of boots thudding through Roman streets and the sight of black-shirted legions on parade stirred the ambitions of a majority of Italians who enthusiastically supported the new order. A few, however, realized that Mussolini, for all his talk of creating a new Rome, was a gangster, the leader of a band of street thugs, a menace to freedom in Italy. The most outspoken of Mussolini's foes was Giacomo Matteotti, a wealthy landowner, a lawyer and student of criminal behavior, and a Socialist member of the Chamber of Deputies.

After an impassioned denunciation of fascism before that parliament, Matteotti vanished. Although his body was never found, he clearly had been murdered by his enemies.

Mussolini at first insisted that his victim had voluntarily left Italy and was living abroad. When accusations of murder began to be heard, the worried dictator tried to present himself as an innocent victim, claiming that anti-Fascists had killed Matteotti in order to discredit *Il Duce*. Finally, in a desperate bid to retain the support of the Italian people, he decided to sacrifice Rossi, who undoubtedly had a hand in the crime. Placed under house arrest, Rossi escaped and fled the country, but Mussolini's agents crossed into Switzerland and dragged him back to Italy, where he was sentenced to 30 years in prison for alleged anti-Fascist activity. (After the dictator's fall, years later, Rossi was arrested by the new Italian government and tried for his participation in the murder of Matteotti. Rossi was found not guilty, more because of his imprisonment and failing health than because of the evidence.)

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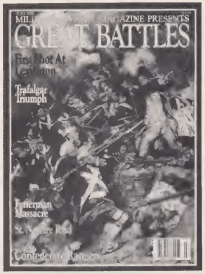
Like Rossi, Italo Balbo had been among the first to realize that Mussolini could inspire loyalty, arouse the enthusiasm of the masses, and stir men to action. Balbo himself succumbed to the magic, raising and organizing Fascist troops and providing encouragement and counsel—all for a few words of praise and an occasional embrace in public. A pioneer aviator who in 1933 organized a mass flight across the Atlantic to Chicago, Balbo was younger than Mussolini and had proved himself a more daring leader of Fascist brawlers when the dictator was consolidating his power. Others might have seen Balbo as a loyal lieutenant or, perhaps, an heir apparent, but Mussolini saw only a possible rival. As a result, Balbo was sent across the Mediterranean to become governor of the colony of Libya. In the summer of 1940, after Italy had entered World War II, an Italian antiaircraft battery shot down Balbo's plane over Tobruk, probably, though not certainly, an accident of war. When Mussolini learned of Balbo's death, he once again showed no indication of regret at the loss of a skilled commander or grief at the passing of a loyal comrade. Marshal Pietro Badoglio, who knew both men well, was with *Il Duce* at the time and concluded that the dictator felt relief rather than sorrow at the airman's death.

Ciano, too, would incur Mussolini's hatred. Married to Edda, *Il Duce*'s eldest child, Ciano was the son of a naval officer who had earned a reputation for heroism against the Austrians in World War I. An educated aristocrat, young Ciano possessed a charm and intelligence lacking in Mussolini's older sons, Bruno and Vittorio. The count took charge of the foreign ministry and was serving as a member of the Fascist Grand Council when the Anglo-American Allies invaded Italy in 1943. He joined a majority of the council members in voting to depose Mussolini and form a government that would negotiate a peace agreement with the Allies.

Ciano sacrificed his safety and personal power to help deliver his country from further suffering, but once the dictator had been toppled, the new Italian government decided to try the count. Ostensibly, his crime was wartime profiteering; actually, the real defendant was fascism, with Ciano serving as a convenient scapegoat. Although he had never disguised his contempt for the Germans, they now rescued him from his countrymen, though only to punish him for turning against *Il Duce*.

Mussolini, too, was rescued by fascism's German allies, and the unfortunate count now faced the wrath of both his father-in-law and the Nazi leadership. Edda Ciano pleaded for her husband's



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life, but her father ignored family bonds and the loyal services that the count had rendered over the years. In desperation, the Cianos tried blackmail, revealing that he had kept a diary since 1937 and threatening to allow its publication abroad to further discredit the Fascist regime. Painfully aware that he could never regain power and that his very life depended upon the Germans, Mussolini considered himself as good as dead, immune to blackmail and as devoid of sympathy for his daughter as he was of gratitude for her husband's work. The Nazis condemned the count to death, Mussolini refused to intervene, and the count perished. Edda smuggled the diary to Switzerland, but her father was dead and Germany had surrendered by the time it appeared in print.

Mussolini's military adventures did Italy no good, brought death and misery to thousands and, in the end, only backfired upon Italy and her international reputation. Invading Ethiopia in the mid-1930s, Mussolini's Italians used modern aircraft and poisonous gas against basically a still-primitive society to earn an easy conquest. Albania in the late 1930s was another small pushover for the comparative monolith directed from Rome. But Mussolini's Rome was no Caesar's Rome—when he turned on Greece, he attempted to swallow too much. Hitler was prompted to come to his rescue, and so Greece fell to the Germans and not to Mussolini.

Worse in the end for both Axis powers, the Greek adventure, also prompting Germany's bullying of Yugoslavia, delayed Hitler's planned invasion of the Soviet Union. Goes the argument—had Hitler reached Moscow before the Russian winter reached him, the outcome in the USSR might have been a bit different.

In any case, the final humiliation to come from Mussolini's career of international dabbling was the spectacle of his erstwhile Nazi ally moving rapidly on the heels of the new Italian government's surrender in 1943 to sweep through and occupy Italy. The Germans then made Mussolini's old territory a bitter battleground for the remainder of the war, giving ground, yes, but ever so slowly and stubbornly.

Just as he had betrayed individuals, Mussolini betrayed an entire nation. Deluded by the fantasy of easy victory, he had led an unprepared Italy into World War II on the side of Nazi Germany. The cost was 77,000 military dead, uncounted civilian casualties and utter destruction. It was no wonder that angry Italians kicked and battered his body until his executioners placed it out of reach, hung head-down beside the corpse of his mistress from the overhead beams of an abandoned gasoline station. □

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Undercover

Continued from page 8

pleas went unanswered. They were left to die a slow, painful death. Finally, an eerie hush descended over the area.

Listening as the Japanese counted 149 bodies, Smith thought, "My God! I'm the only one alive."

Then they started dragging the charred bodies and throwing them into the trenches. When he saw the Japanese place dynamite on top of the bodies and cover them with dirt, he realized they were going to make it appear that the American bombers had killed the POWs.

Smith, terror-stricken, guessed what was coming next. The Japanese soldiers had lined up shoulder-to-shoulder, and now they started advancing in unison, jabbing the ground and probing in the weeds with bayonets. Smith lay virtually frozen as one Japanese came closer. His jab came down hard near Smith, then he stepped on Smith's back, but he kept moving. Smith held back a sigh of relief.

He didn't have to consider any choices for his next move. Ironically, the POWs had had a heated discussion about trying to escape by swimming across the adjoining Puerto Princesa Bay. Smith had insisted that there wasn't a man among them who could swim the distance of approximately three miles. He told them he knew he could not do it, even though he was in better shape than most of them. But now there was no other choice.

Darkness came, and he crawled down to the beach the same way he had come up. From the ground level, he could see a Japanese guard silhouetted against the skyline. Smith waited patiently until the guard turned away and then eased into the water for the long swim across Puerto Princesa Bay.

He swam underwater as long as he could hold his breath—then, swimming on his side, he reached forward with both hands making relaxed but deliberate movements. Occasionally, he turned over and swam on his back, and this provided some rest.

He concentrated on swimming efficiently and navigating toward the Iwahig Penal Colony located across the bay. He hoped someone there might help him, if he made it. He aimed for the northeast corner of a large fish trap. Two bright stars in line with a high mountain directly behind the fish trap made navigating easier.

Long before he had entered the water for the lonely swim, Smith had survived other appalling, life-threatening conditions. On Corregidor in 1942, he had survived on a half-ration a day in one of the longest and most intense bombardments of World War II. After the sur-

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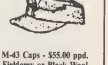

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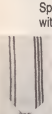

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render in May and while in prison at Camp Cabanatuan, the young Marine saw 20 to 30 POWs die every day from dysentery, malaria and malnutrition.

He had decided he must find a way out. In July 1942, when the Japanese asked for volunteers for an undisclosed detail, he had managed to get on the Palawan detail.

Now, about halfway across the bay, he thought, "Damn! I'm not going to make it." Just as he was about to lapse into unconsciousness, he felt the strong jaws of a shark clamp on to his right arm. With his left arm, he hit the shark as hard as he could. The shark flipped, and both of them did a somersault above the water. Falling back into the water, Smith's attacker disappeared.

The shark encounter was unwelcome, but the meeting seemed to revive Smith. Immediately, too, a school of dolphins surrounded him.

As he swam along, Smith could look up and see the friendly dolphins' long triangular fins silhouetted against the sky. Exhausted, he tried in vain several times to hitch a ride from them as they escorted him toward the shore. Finally, he bumped into the fish trap. Hanging onto its bamboo poles, he rested.

Suddenly, a Japanese patrol boat caught him by surprise. Smith took a deep breath, grabbed a bamboo pole, and pulled himself under the water. The boat closed within a few feet of him before it continued on its way.

After swimming closer to the shore, he mustered his last ounce of energy and tried to swim the few remaining yards. Just as he was about to go under, his knees touched bottom—he began a slow, torturous crawl. Finally he could go no farther; he had to lie down. When he turned over on his back, his nose was just out of the water.

In a couple of hours, daylight came and he slowly stood up. Partially revived, he realized the task now was to put as much distance as possible between himself and the Japanese as quickly as he could. So, he entered a broad swamp separating him from the huts in the penal colony.

The swamp, covered with a tropical forest, was relatively dark under the canopy. The upper part of the tree roots were above the water and muck. With swarms of mosquitoes about to eat him alive, Smith rolled in the mud and plastered himself. He moved through the swamp by stepping from the roots of one tree to the next.

He struggled through the swamp most of the day before he sighted a hut about a mile away on higher ground at the base of a mountain. He thought the prisoners there, part of a farming community, might help him. The prisoners lived in an isolated area on an honor system.

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"I'm your friend, Joe," the Filipino pleaded. Smith decided to trust him. After Smith told him what had happened, the Filipino said that he would get help.

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Reassured, Smith dropped his guard—just "fell apart," completely exhausted. The Filipinos cleaned him, painted him with iodine and found him some clothes. It was getting dark, and they would have to travel some 25 miles before daylight to get him past the southernmost Japanese outpost. By morning, they had successfully passed the outpost and reached the guerrilla headquarters.

Soon, a runner joined them and reported that two more fugitive POWs were waiting for them farther down their path. Later, another runner appeared to report three more.

Each day during the 80-mile trip, the small band had come upon a shack hidden away and found a hot meal awaiting them. Although the oldest guerrilla was only 16, Willie Smith had felt safe in their hands.

The guerrilla headquarters at Brook's Point contacted nearby American forces. On Christmas Day, the POWs who had managed to escape Palawan climbed aboard a seaplane and flew to safe haven. Glen McDole and two more POWs turned up later, also alive and safe.

All the Palawan escapees had managed to swim the bay, but at different times. McDole had hidden in the trash pile on the beach, then in a large coral stone formation for 42 hours.

Willie Smith's ordeal did not end when he returned home after the war to Hughes Springs, Texas. He had nightmares and trouble keeping a job. When he became severely depressed, however, he would call his friend Glen McDole in Des Moines, Iowa. With the frequent discussions with Glen, coupled with finding a wonderful lady, Mary Bess Ross, and marrying her, Willie was able to adjust. Now he is a retired steel worker, happily married, proud parent of three children and grandfather to 10. □

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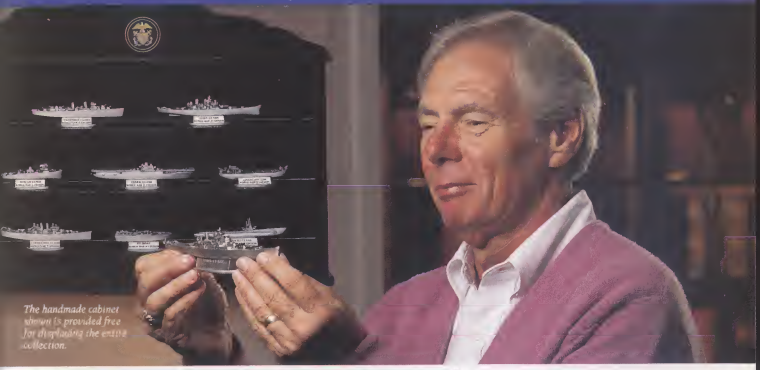

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